Isaac ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

1.75 AUGUST 1983

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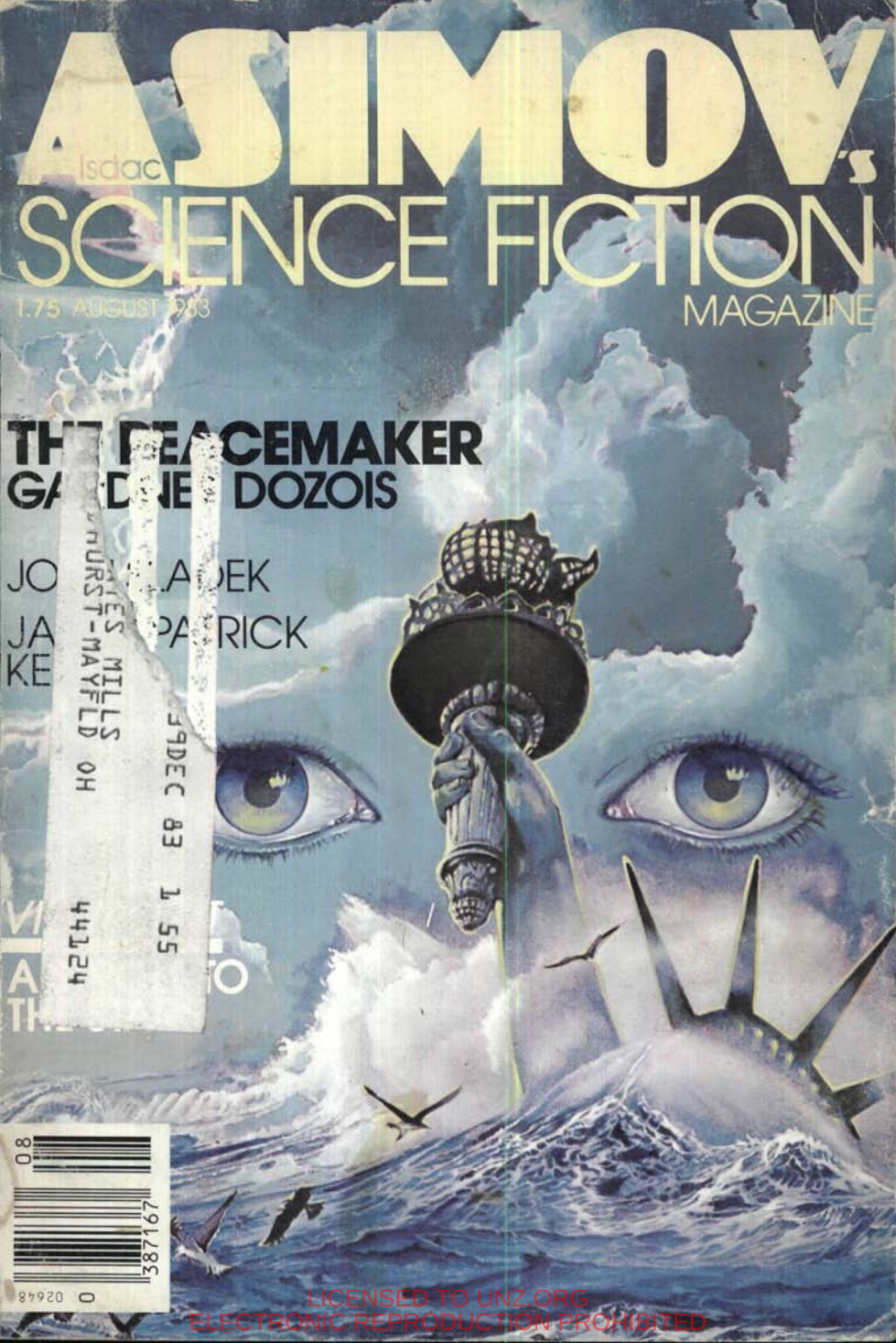

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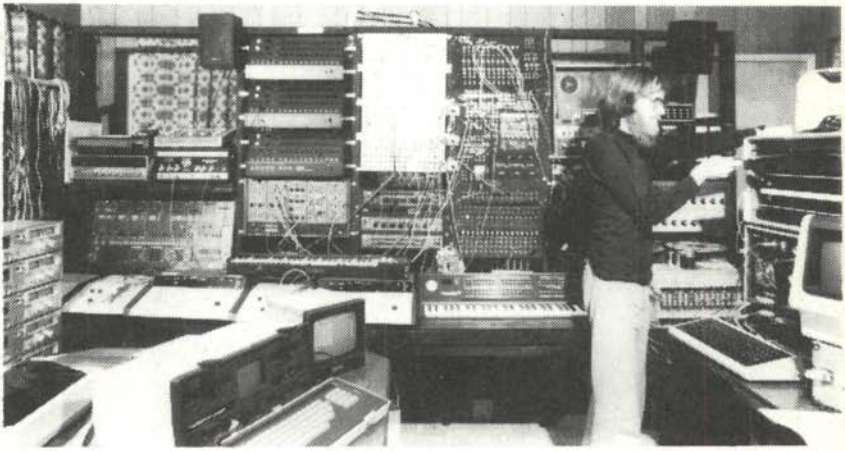

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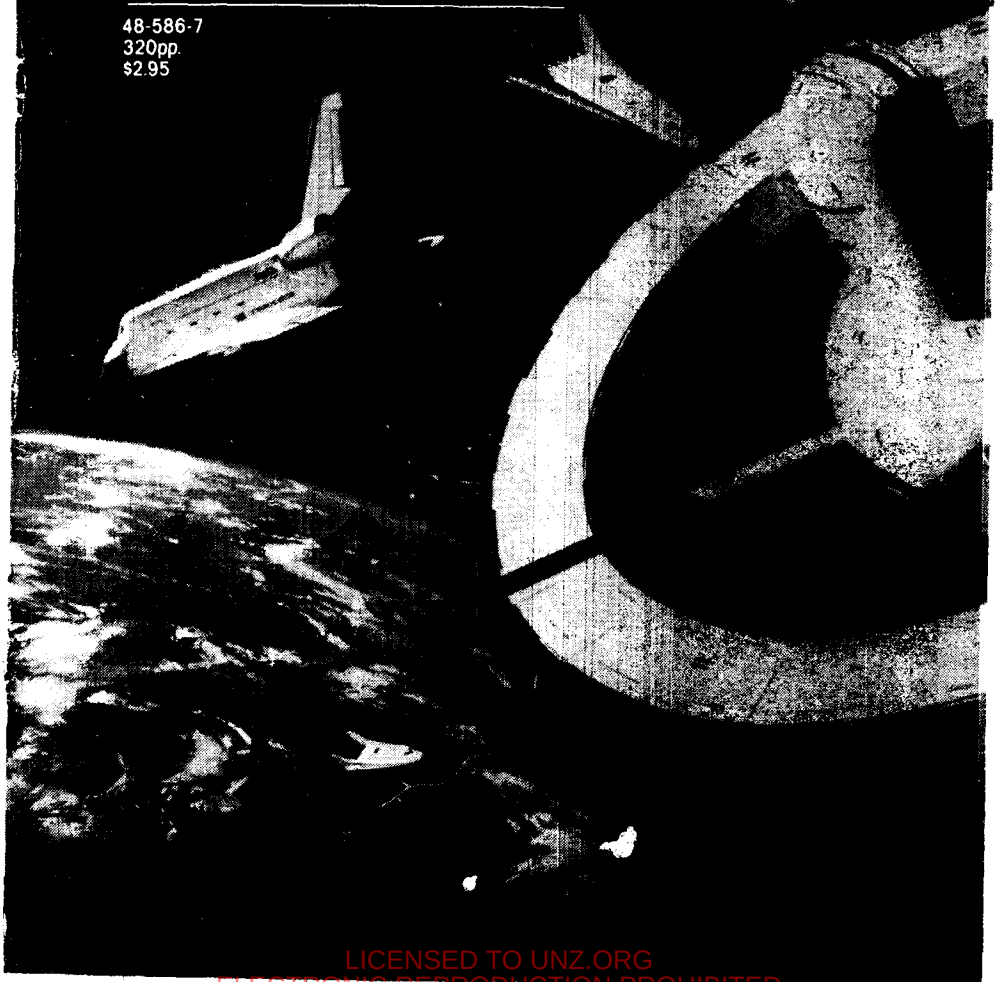

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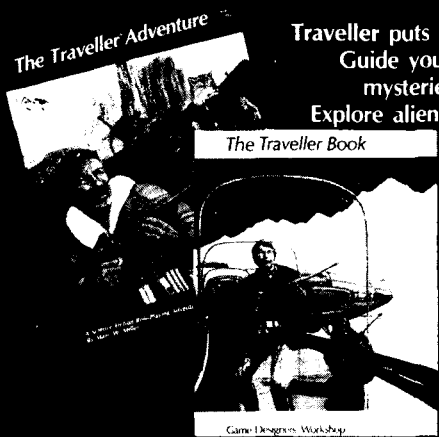

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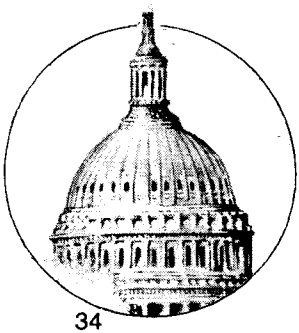

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

SHRUGGING IT OFF

In a recent issue of a national magazine there was an article about science fiction which Shawna brought to my attention.*

The title told one exactly what the tone would be for it was "Destination: Void" —perfectly and logically dramatic as the title of a science fiction novel, but clearly intended to be a sneer when used as the title for an article *about* science fiction. If there were any doubt about the matter after that, there was the blurb, which read, "Science fiction is to fiction as Christian Science is to science."

"I don't think I'm going to like this, Shawna," I said.

"I *know* you won't," said Shawna, grimly.

And I didn't. It was a vitriolic attack on every aspect of science fiction and on all its writers and readers. So sweeping was the denunciation, in fact, that it would have been insulting to have been left out, and, fortunately, I wasn't. I received only a glancing sneer, to be sure, but that was better than nothing. Referring to the Foundation series, the writer said, "In a much honored trilogy, soon to be a quartet and God knows what else—" (Actually, the word he was groping for, but did not know, was "tetralogy" and, beyond that, "pentology" and "hexology," or, simply, the general term "series," but one must not place too great a strain on a simple mind.)

My initial impulse—as always in such cases—was to write an article of equal length as a brief for the defense, and try to argue the magazine into publishing it, but I didn't have to think long before I realized that this would be a foolish deed. Far better, I decided, for all of us to shrug it off and to go about our business of reading, writing, and publishing science fiction.

That decision made, I would have dismissed the whole thing from my mind, were it not that, within days, letters began to arrive that referred to this article with indignation and anger. Consequently, I suppose I had better explain the grounds for ignoring it.

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In the first place, the analysis of science fiction, as presented by the writer, is so uniformly unfavorable that, after the initial shock, it can't help but provoke a laugh.

What? Is there *nothing* that is good in science fiction? Is there *no* piece of writing that is readable? I won't ask the writer to admit that somewhere there are a few paragraphs worthy of comparison with Tolstoy or Shakespeare—but is there nothing at all that is comparable to, say, Dorothy Sayers.

Is every science fiction writer a subliterary bungler; every novel a piece of unadulterated trash; every idea beneath contempt?

Surely nothing on earth could be *that* bad! If we all tried very, very hard to write and publish material without a grain of redeeming virtue, we would probably fail to plumb the depths described in the article.

I could conceive of an article which, written in moderate terms, might acknowledge certain virtues of science fiction as a concept, of certain skills in some of the stories written by some of the writers, and might then point out that the flaws and demerits far outweigh the positive values, so that the field in general would represent a morass that had best be avoided. This might be sufficiently convincing to place our field in a position uncomfortable enough to make a defense necessary.

But this silly stuff isn't worth more than a snicker and a yawn.

In fact, one might ask, if one is, like myself, congenitally curious about anything that is out of the ordinary, why on earth should anyone write an article like this? It is not the kind of article anyone with even a moderate supply of common sense would write if he seriously intended to wound us. Why, then, write it at all?

It might help if we knew something about the writer of the article, but his name is utterly unfamiliar to me and to Shawna. Nor is the little "bio" at the foot of the first column any real help. That merely says that he "is a poet who used to write book reviews and animal features—"

If we accept this at face value, we have someone who can scarcely have a more microscopic set of credentials in the literary field generally, and who would seem to have none at all in science fiction.

And yet the writing is adequate, and even shows a rather crude ability at handling invective, such as one would find among the teen-age contributors to some of the science fiction fan magazines in the good old days of the late 1930s. (Harlan Ellison would surely have reached this level of vitriol at

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12, and I might have managed at 15, if I were in the mood.)

Furthermore, the writer seems to be up on all the important novels of the genre, so that it is a fair assumption that he has done a lot of science fiction reading. (One wonders, by the way, why he reads so widely in a field he despises so thoroughly. Is he an SF junkie who hates it but can't stay away from it? Does he swear off, knowing the damage it is doing to his brain, and does he then return to it with trembling hands, reading it by the light of a flashlight in a hidden corner of the cellar of his house? Does he curse his weakness even as he pants and drools at the sight of those book-jackets?)

Given, then, his ability to turn a phrase or two, and his wide knowledge of our field, it seems reasonable to wonder if he has not tried his hand at writing science fiction. If so, he must have been rejected right and left, for certainly I know of nothing published under his name.

The trouble is, though, that Shawna and I don't know of anything submitted under his name, either, at least to *this* magazine. Perhaps he only longs to write science fiction but has never quite dared to commit his obscure dreams to paper, or, having done so, has never quite dared to put them to the test of editorial decision.

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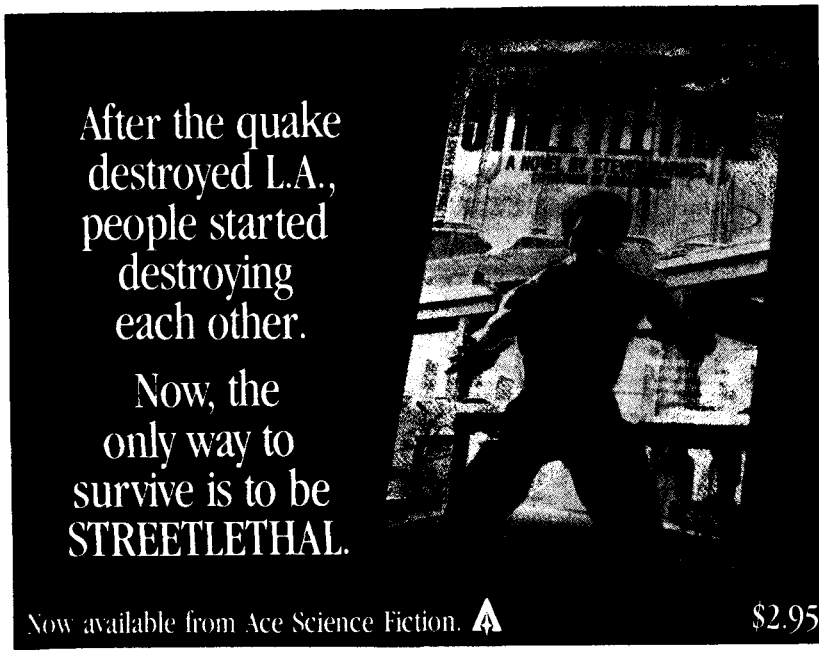
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Either way there is the tempting conclusion that he is writing out of wounded vanity and envious pique and, like Aesop's fox, who couldn't reach the grapes, has decided they are sour, anyway. Very sour. Excessively sour.

Poor fellow.

Or can it be, perhaps, that the unknown nature of his name is merely an illusion. Perhaps he is someone we all know who is writing under a pen-name.

Frankly, I doubt that. If he is in any way prominent in our field and is striking out at it in so wholesale and nasty a manner and is, while doing so, hiding behind the shield of pseudonymity, he would no longer be deserving of pity, but only of contempt. I can't think of anyone in the field who would want to strike out from ambush, or, if he had the urge to do it, would run the risk of the contempt he would earn (not for exercising his right to free speech, I repeat, but for fearing to put his name to it).

And there is an allied question. Why should a national magazine of considerable prestige feel the urge to devote four pages to so uncritical and, therefore, worthless a diatribe?

Here, I think, we ought to feel rather complimented.

In the old days, when I was just beginning to try my hand at science fiction, no national magazine would have wasted

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four pages of denunciation of the field; or four paragraphs, either; or even four words, I think. In fact, let's face it—the editorial staff of a magazine like the one that published the article, would, back in 1938, never have *heard* of science fiction (with the possible exception of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells).

But now—how things have changed! The biggest blockbusters on the silver screen are science fiction movies, including *Star Wars* and *E. T.*, the biggest of them all. The top five items on this week's New York *Times* best-seller list (as I write) are either science fiction or science-fiction-related, and still include two of science fiction's Big Three. The paperback shelves are heavy-laden with science fiction and fantasy.

For goodness' sake, science fiction is *worth* denouncing these days. The editors of the prestigious magazine that published the article have heard of us, you see, and they think that enough of their readers have heard of us to make it worthwhile to devote four pages to us. They feel that perhaps additional readers, who would not otherwise bother to read the magazine, would purchase copies to read what they have to say of us.

They are, in fact, trying to get a free ride on our backs.

And what, after all, is wrong with that? My hope is that our field (especially the more-carefully-thought-out and better-written aspects thereof) will continue to become more important and more influential on the public scene, and that its dominating ideas will become sufficiently threatening to fools and rogues to induce them all to denounce us. ●

**Harper's, December 1982*

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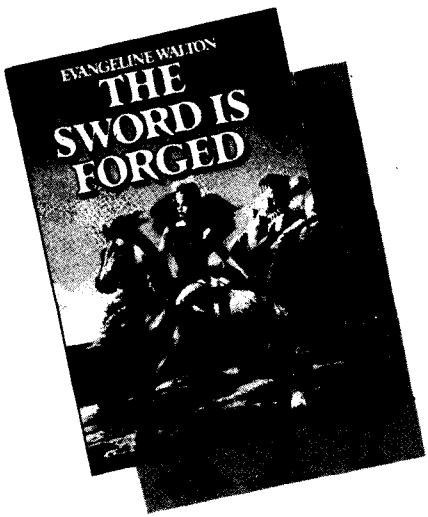

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TIMESCAPE

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LETTERS

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I have noticed a number of changes in your magazine since the editor shifts and I think they are for the better. In general, the average reader age aimed for seems to have risen by about two years. It wouldn't hurt if it would go up another two years. I am a university student studying art and reading and writing sf, and it isn't the adolescent aspects of the field that I like but its more enduring qualities. I suspect many of your readers and potential readers feel the same way.

To begin with, I heartily approve of the profiles. People who can't read and appreciate non-fiction have something wrong with them. The most valuable things in life and art are non-fiction. Charles Platt did excellent work on his profiles of William Burroughs and Jerry Pournelle. They were both presented quite well which must be a bit difficult since each in his own way is a somewhat controversial character.

As far as stories go, the best have been: Peter Payack's "The Institute for Scientific Non-Rational Thought"; Joan Aiken's "Two Races"; Wil Creveling's "Fun"; Art Vesity's "First Day" which I enjoyed mostly for its descriptive passages, although I didn't find "The Protector" convincing; and Richard Lupoff's "Stomping Down Stroka Prospekt" which was good, not because of the sex (sex and violence of themselves never contribute to the quality of literature), but because of its literary excellence and because it ends with something like a Joycean epiphany (a moment of insight for the character and/or reader).

I like two of your illustrators, Janet Aulisio (especially her illustration for "Cutting Down") and Marc Yankus (especially his illustration for "Romance of the Equator"). I'm also starting to like "Mooney's Module."

And, yes, here's one of my stories. I've sent you several already and I sincerely hope you'll start buying some.

Kent Martens

Shawna is anything but adolescent, so I think that if anything adolescent remains about the magazine it is going to be my fault. Of course, I expect Shawna to keep a sharp eye on me, but that's only fair. I keep a sharp eye on her.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I have just read your editorial in the February edition of your mag-

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azine. I must say that I do sympathize with the readers who "demand" more Asimov fiction.

You see, I grew up, or nearly so, in a library, carefully devouring everything from A to Z (not quite literally, and found myself returning to your novels repeatedly. Consequently, having turned, unconsciously, into a science fiction fan, I turned to the sciences for further enlightenment. I majored in Chemistry in college ("C" how much I like it?). My next goal is to become a patent attorney to stay in even closer touch with the state-of-the-art technology.

I credit you and your writing with pointing me in *my* right direction, and with helping me to sustain my enthusiasm and excitement for the "hard" sciences. (You should be very happy here, jump up and down a little!)

Nevertheless, I don't want to be selfish and keep you from doing something that you think is important, so I will not insist that you keep writing more for the mag. Just keep in mind that there are many of us, wandering around with big grins on our faces, everytime something new of yours is published, and that you may inspire more young (wo)men to go into the sciences (which are suffering from a lack of sincere *sf*udents).

Do as you think best, Gentle Writer, but please remember to exercise, eat healthy foods, and stay with us for a long time to come.

Joan White
Lombard, IL

Thank you for a very kind letter, and one that seems to represent the views of the readers generally (at least, of those who have written). Your last sentence sounds familiar; I get it from dear Janet all the time.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I have not written to you for a while; I am writing now to reply to your request, in the editorial in the February 1983 issue of *IAsfm*, for readers' opinions as to whether you should attempt to increase your fictional writing for that magazine.

I agree with the general consensus that your fiction is very good. (Of course I first wrote to express my appreciation of it in 1966.) I also feel that the real point of *IAsfm* is to read material which is in the spirit of Isaac Asimov, not necessarily by Isaac Asimov personally. Hence, while I am always happy to read your fiction, I am also happy to read good fiction by other writers, and will not mind if your own fictional appearances in your magazine are relatively few.

Your editorials do much more to create the distinctive identity of *IAsfm* than any amount of Asimov fiction could, and it is the editorials which I consider indispensible. Excellent fiction is written, as you know, by many of your contributors—Barry Longyear and David Brin deserve special mention—and so no burden rests upon you to hold up that particular end of things.

In summary I think that you should feel free to write fiction for *IAsfm* when you feel particularly inspired to do so, but that otherwise you should feel no pressure for continual fictional appearances in order to help the magazine to live up to its name. The magazine has

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lived up to its name most admirably, because of other writers who have succeeded in writing in the spirit of Asimov.

Incidentally I have just finished reading the two volumes of your autobiography and enjoyed them immensely—a truly fascinating chronicle.

Keep up the good work.

David Palter
1811 Tamarind Ave., Apt. 22
Hollywood, CA 90028

I couldn't agree with you more strenuously, but I will *try to write additional stories when I can think of some. Especially the George and Azazel stories. I love them.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I entered a subscription for *IAsfm* because I have long been a fan of yours but only fairly recently a science fiction reader. My first copy, happily, was the special *Foundation's Edge* issue, but I didn't rush to read the chapters. I had already bought and read the entire book avidly. (The Foundation Trilogy being three of the perhaps two dozen SF novels I have read to date and by far my favorites.) I am happy to have that issue to keep alongside the book, so please do not be embarrassed by "your" magazine's blowing your horn for you. The editors were right.

As to including *more* Asimov, my subscription is quite new so I can't judge. I subscribed, however, trusting that if you were anywhere you would be in that magazine, so I would tend to vote Yes. But I'm not greedy. After all, I have scores of other Asimov fact and fiction books to catch up on. But I do pity those fans who are up to date and must scour all sources for your latest prose.

As you seem primarily concerned about taking up space in the magazine and taking writing time away from other worthy projects, why not introduce something new to SF writing, the Minute SF. Like Minute Mysteries, they can be read in a minute or two, and shouldn't take up more space than half a page so won't "bump" the longer short stories by other and new writers. Considering your expertise, perhaps you'll be able to toss one off in ten minutes or so. If anyone can do it, you can. And then we *IAsfm* readers can have our Asimov and read other SF too.

Claire Bazinet
Flushing, NY

Your notion of "Minute SF" is interesting, but short is not necessarily easy. There's the gentleman who wrote a letter and concluded with "Please forgive this long letter, but I didn't have time to write a short one."

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

Re: Your editorial in the February 1983 *IAsfm*. I consider myself an average reader of science fiction (especially your magazine) and my opinion as to whether or not there should be more Asimov in the magazine is that the rate that the stories appear is adequate as it is right now. I admit I enjoy your short stories as much as anyone, but you are an established

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writer, and (I feel) your time would be better spent on longer commitments, whereas your magazine should devote itself to the publication of stories by younger or unknown writers who do need the income (by the way, I myself am not a writer of *any* kind).

I give as evidence the publication of *Foundation's Edge*—it's an excellent novel (sequel), and I only wish it had been written a few years earlier.

Cecelia Grzeskowiak
204 Swartmore Drive
Hampton, VA 23666

Well, now I wish it had been written a few years earlier, too, but if you were as scared as I was at the prospect, you would probably praise me for having managed to scrape up the guts to do it when I did.
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Doctor Asimov,

In response to your recent plea for advice concerning your future writing endeavors let me be blunt. Do what you want to do! If you want to write full length fiction novels—write them. If you want to write non-fiction—by all means do so. Your talent is not mine (or a collection of fans' or a publisher's) to command. It is yours and yours alone. You only have one life, Dr. Asimov. Live it the way you want to live it.

You cite an "obligation" to a publisher. Without authors such as yourself there would be no publishers. You mention "gratitude" to your fans. Without your talent there would be no one to praise. You have made us fans—we did not make you a success. Alexander G. Bell's backers recognized his talents and wanted him to improve the telegraph. Had he done so my telephone bill might not be so high (or existent) every month.

I, for one, would not care to read only those pieces which I thought that, as a fan, you owed me. Your clarity of style in non-fiction science (and non-science) works makes you an excellent teacher. Your logic in developing plots and backgrounds makes you an exceptional science and science-mystery writer. (I will refrain from mentioning your devastating good looks making you a real lady-killer—this is a *serious* letter!)

Honestly Doctor, you cannot please everyone. Write fiction and the science readers will cry. Write fact and the fiction readers will scream. Write novels and the short story group will whine. Etc. Etc. Your genius was not a gift from us. Write what you *have* to write—*need* to write—are inwardly *compelled* to write. And we will read it. You are far beyond that portion of your life when high school and college instructors gave you writing assignments. If you are writing only for money then you will cater to the masses. If you are writing because you can't *not* write then you will be true to *that* inner drive.

I personally don't want to read fiction, non-fiction, short story or novel. I want to read ASIMOV. In any form. Thank you.

Please, live long and prosper.

Kris Kurian
2411 40th St. NE
Canton, OH 44705

Imagine having my devastating

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good looks and yet being compelled to write all the time while all those nice young ladies wait anxiously and endlessly for me.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I've recently become a subscriber to *IAsfm* and would like to compliment you and your staff on an excellent publication. I enjoy reading all sections of the magazine, although I have my favorites of course. One of these that I feel has not received enough attention by readers (as might be expressed in the Letters section) is Mooney's Module. The imaginative ideas and accompanying drawings by Gerry Mooney always bring a smile to my face when I see them, and I've often wondered if his work has been offered commercially to the public in the form of wall posters. I'd love to see the module on gravity ("It isn't just a good idea. It's the law.") hanging from one of my walls!

Of course, the Editorial and Viewpoint sections are among the first that I read, and I think you've done a tremendous job with both. Concerning the stories that you publish, I would just like to make a plea for more that contain humor and irony, because they are my favorites. (To keep this alive, I've even begun to write a story of my own with these qualities in it.) And, finally, I hope to see more work by the Good Doctor in future issues, for these are among the best of the lot.

Glen A. Hill
St. Paul, MN

Mooney's Module was one of Kathleen's discoveries and it is quite a unique addition to the magazine. I'm glad you like it.

—Isaac Asimov

Attention: Shawna
Gentlemen:

If you insist on publishing fantasy, I must insist on cancelling my subscription. Your cover says SCIENCE FICTION and that is what I expect.

Another thing I noticed was that the gaming article was written by the same author in both *Analog* AND *Asimov*.

Also, I hate the crossword puzzles.

I DON'T CARE WHAT YOUR READING TASTES ARE, SO PLEASE, NO FANTASY.

Very truly yours,
AN UNSATISFIED CUSTOMER

Now pause. Take a deep breath. You know that if you insist on perfection, you will get very little out of life. Ask yourself, instead, if, on balance, the magazine presents you with considerably more satisfactory material than unsatisfactory. (Remember there are also other readers with other tastes.)

—Isaac Asimov

P.S. I am not a gentleman. Never have been, never will be.

—Shawna McCarthy

Dear Dr. Asimov (and others listening in),

I certainly wouldn't want to distract you from your work on the Bible, or Shakespeare, or Ancient Rome or even Science, BUT . . . If it has to be those things *OR* Sci-

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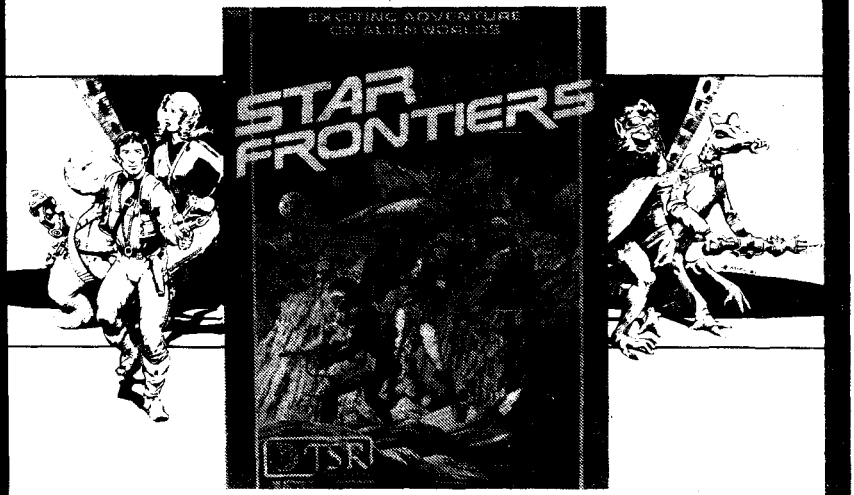

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ence Fiction, I'll have to vote for Science Fiction. (Do I get a vote?)

On the other hand, if the question is whether to print said Science Fiction in *IAsfm* rather than writing novels (a new Lije Baley/R. Daneel mystery—Oh, joy!), I'd actually much prefer the novels, just because I enjoy your novels (and connected shorts) more than your more numerous shorts (with a few exceptions).

On the third hand, if the question is whether your shorts should displace the work of others in *IAsfm*, I don't have any problem with that. 1) I don't even concern myself with whether you would be *unfairly* displacing others (due to your position). I don't think you would have to force your way in. At worst, if your reputation subconsciously affects Shawna's decisions in your favor, you probably deserve the special treatment. (Note that I didn't specify what that reputation was in.) 2) I'd still prefer at least some SF output from your typewriter (word processor?) over non-fiction alone, even at the risk of occasionally displacing some other writer.

All in all, though, I go along with Hugh: More novels, please. (I do continue to appreciate your humor work, however.)

Bob Abrahams
Los Angeles, CA

Shawna's all right. She has rejected one story of mine so far, for good and sufficient reasons. (Don't worry. It was printed elsewhere.)

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editor,

I thought I could subscribe for a year to your magazine and then try another science fiction magazine. At this point I find I'm much too attached to let my subscription run out.

I have learned much by reading the stories you publish although sometimes I wonder why you publish some of them. More importantly, I keep being inspired to write myself. Thanks for your efforts.

Also, congratulations to the new editor, Shawna McCarthy.

Thanks again,

Wanda LaMontagne
Portland, OR

That's the danger of this magazine. We're addictive—and proud of it.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna McCarthy;

As an avid *Asimov's* fan, I was delighted to read the Good Doctor's editorial in the January issue announcing you as editor —congratulations! When I turned to the first story, however, my elation fell.

I have given "Romance of the Equator" what I believe is a fair wait-and-reread, and still it strikes a sour note. It is not SF. It contains no science-fictional elements, unless one counts a volcanic eruption that throws hills two hundred miles but does not harm the main character.

"Romance" is fantasy, and demeaning to women besides. I know you said that you would experiment, but I thought you meant to print SF that leant more towards fantasy than what usually appears

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in *Asimov's*. Please, dear kind Shawna, leave out the pure fantasy, or change the name of the magazine.

Janie Helser
1114 Sumner St.
Wheaton, IL 60187

The nature of experiment is to be uncertain of the result. If the result were known in advance, there'd be no need to experiment. If the general reader opinion would seem to be against a fable that investigates the meaning of love, we will have learned something.

—Isaac Asimov

Dr. Asimov:

You tackled an interesting and fertile subject in "Women and Science Fiction" but in the way you executed the article there was actually more revealed about yourself than the subject at hand. You did not excuse the exclusion of female characters in early SF but you did offer explanations. One explanation was "... if there's no sex, what do you do with female characters?" and the fact that you consider that an at least partially valid explanation shows that you are suffering from the same mental block you and your colleagues did when you were younger. You say that writers of SF (some of them, at least) did not put female characters in stories because sex might eventually be involved and later in the column you equate knowledge and understanding of women with loss of innocence (a word that, perhaps, should be excised from the dictionary). This all stems from the myth that women are some strange unknown creatures whom you can work with and be married to but whom you can never treat the normal way you would treat any other friend. This might account for the way many acclaimed poets have continually referred to women as foreign objects and the way many of them have set the species up on a pedestal yet refuse to acknowledge them as common people capable of common companionship —they are skinny adolescents with acne at heart. Take it from a writer much more famous than me, who said "Women are just men with petticoats."

Ted Corley
Gretna, LA

I'm sorry. Nothing on Earth will ever make me believe that women are just men with petticoats. I assure you that no man is going to kiss me even if he wears five petticoats. Listen, I could tell a woman from a man even if they were wearing no clothes at all.

—Isaac Asimov

On a more serious note, in an otherwise well-reasoned letter, I am curious as to why you refer to women as a "species." I assure you, we are the same species, exactly, as men.

—Shawna McCarthy

Dear Dr. A and Those in Charge,

You have requested our opinions concerning "more Asimov," and here is mine:

I see that you are a person of conscience, and that there is more to this problem than meets the casual eye. However, dear Dr., there will

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always be critics. The Takawhack Club is large, and any public figure is a good target. I beg of you not to lean over backwards in your effort to do the right thing. Your stories are about good, decent people, trying their best to solve human problems. What could be *more* needed in this world? The fact that they are fictional does not diminish the lessons taught. Indeed, *I* believe fiction presents those ideas in a manner that is more easy to absorb, for some of us. A point goes straight to my heart, when it is illustrated by people's suffering.

There are surely many readers like me who can only enjoy certain styles of writing? We love our favorite authors. Many of us truly do wait with bated breath for you to turn on the book machine again. There is a huge amount of bad stuff around and we need your stuff to balance it out!! You certainly could never with justice be criticized for neglecting or taking from new authors, sir. Anyone with good taste and discernment (like me!) can clearly see that you *care*.

I am fascinated by Multivac. I think *The Caves of Steel* and *The Naked Sun* are just *begging* to become a trilogy (or a quintology, if that is the word I want?); because for me, nothing can ever supersede Robots. Dear, dear, how I love Robots. (Gentle Hint from Gentle Reader.) "The Feeling of Power," in *Nine Tomorrows*, was my other favorite.

And so—heavens, yes—more Asimov. Please, dear Dr., don't let your very becoming modesty deny us the fascination and pleasure of reading new Asimovs. And they *do pay*, don't they? (A little crass note, there, huh?)

Hope I haven't roused any Beasts in any Breasts. Reasonable people *must* agree with me on this. If not, just Phile my Phun under Phorgotten Phemales!!

I like the covers, too!! Except the last one; it was a little horrifying to see those Bee's Knees so graphically—sorry. I like *beautiful* art. Female to the last. *So?* I'm sure the Dr. doesn't mind!

Ginny Kolecka
115 Daisy Ct.,
Hercules, CA 94547

Thank goodness I am a truly modest man, or letters like this one would turn my head.

—Isaac Asimov

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THE SUPREMACY OF BACTERIA

Like a flounder in shoreline sand,
the vast Pre-Cambrian microbial mats
lurk stable throughout our ecosystems,
invisible as air.

Spread thin under the pretense of soil and water,
they survived the four million millennia
abdicating the rule absolute
to be exiled, enfossiled into stromatolites.

Yet their necessity still haunts our intestines,
and bonds the vegetable in matrimony
to that noble gas nitrogen.
They practice a most sophisticate chemistry.

So do not discount their gypsy influence,
for bacteria may have engineered us solely
to explore lunar dust and Martian clays
for their most distant of cousins.

—**Robert Frazier**

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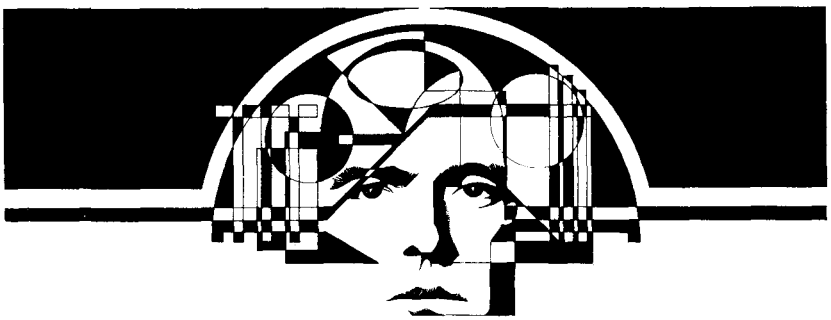
MARTIN GARDNER

THE JOCK WHO WANTED TO BE FIFTY



By the year 2001 the United States had made remarkable strides in all the sciences. At the same time, the rapid decline in the teaching of mathematics, which began with the twentieth-century computer revolution, had accelerated.

Dr. Ophelia Bumpers, professor of mathematics at the University of Miami, was 47 years old, but she looked and behaved like a gorgeous brunette of 27. One of her students, in her "Introduction to Elementary Algebra" class, was Lucky O'Toole, age 19, and captain of the university's football team. O'Toole was not too bright, but he was good looking, virile, and hopelessly in love with his teacher. Ophelia didn't mind. In fact, she had instigated the romance.

One sultry afternoon, when the pair was relaxing on a sandy beach in their bathing trunks, Lucky lay on his back with his head in Ophelia's lap. "You must have heard," he said, "about the big genetic breakthrough last week. Some biologists at Harvard have found a way to age a person any number of years in just a few weeks of treatment."

"I read about it in the *National Enquirer*," said Ophelia. "I understand the process is irreversible."

"It is," said Lucky. "But I don't mind. I've made an appointment with the Harvard group to serve as a volunteer subject. They say

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they can boost my age to 50. If it works, you and me can get married."

Ophelia took her hand out of Lucky's curly hair to put it over her mouth. "I can't believe it! You'll lose thirty of the best years of your life!"

Ophelia was not only profoundly shocked. She was enormously annoyed. "Look, Lucky, you're exactly the age now you really want to be. I can prove it with algebra." She pointed to the right. "Hand me that notepad and I'll show you." Ophelia always carried a pad and pencil with her. She was a creative mathematician, and whenever an inspiration struck she liked to jot down the essentials before she forgot them.

"We'll let n stand for your age now," she said, "and a for the age you want to be, and d for the difference between the two ages."

Lucky nodded. So far he understood.

"Obviously," Ophelia continued, "we can write this equality:

$$a = n + d.$$

"Let's multiply each side by $(a - n)$:

$$a(a - n) = (n + d)(a - n).$$

"After performing the two multiplications, the result is:

$$a^2 - an = an + ad - n^2 - nd.$$

"Subtract ad from both sides. This gives us:

$$a^2 - an - ad = an - n^2 - nd.$$

"Factor both sides:

$$a(a - n - d) = n(a - n - d).$$

"Now we cancel $(a - n - d)$ from both sides. And see what results!

$$a = n.$$

"Remember," Ophelia went on, "a is the age you want to be and n is the age you are now. I've just proved—and you can't argue with algebra—that the two ages are identical. You're just the age you prefer!"

Lucky scratched his head. He had learned enough algebra to follow each step of the proof. Every transformation of the original equation seemed legit.

Of course Ophelia was not serious. To Lucky's embarrassment she cackled with merriment when she saw the perplexed look on his face. Something obviously is wrong with her proof, but what? If you can't find its fatal flaw, take a look at page 30.

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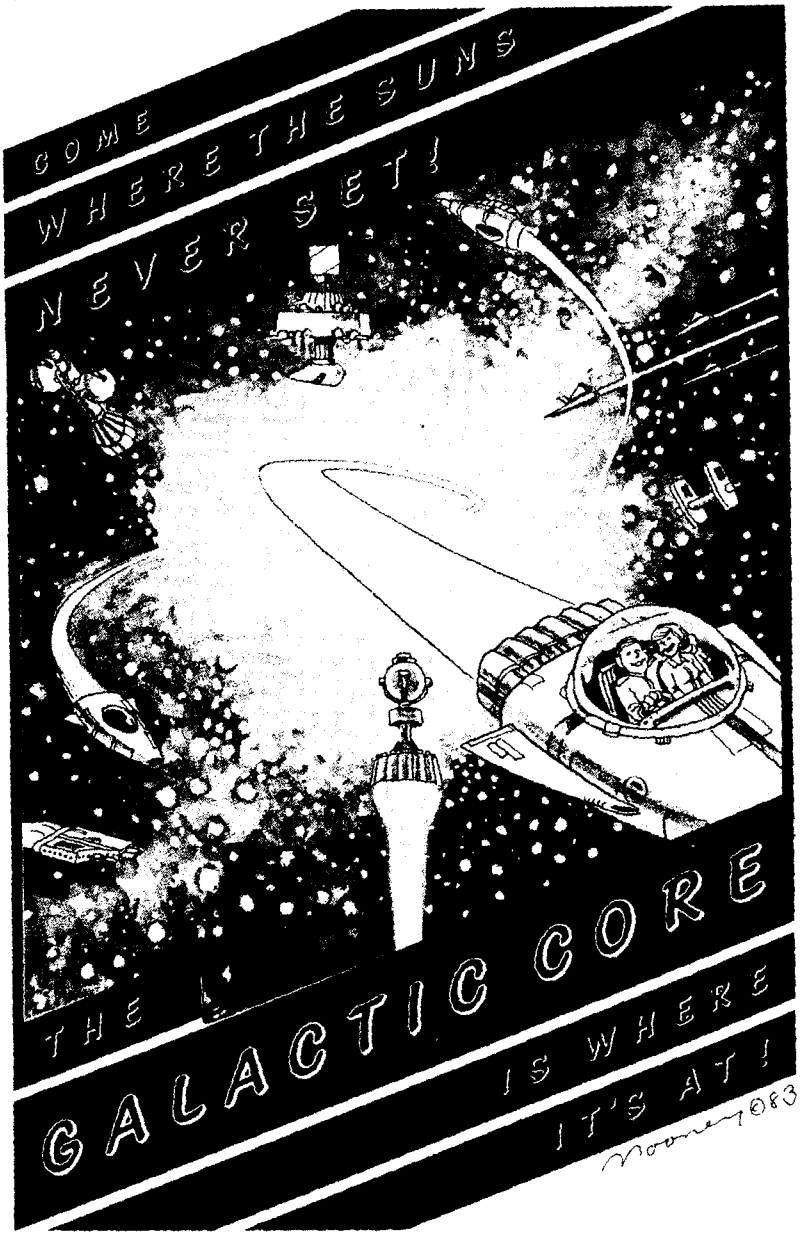
MOONEY'S MODULE



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GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

"It's great fun for an evening. Drink some wine, yell at your friends, and have a good time." This is the evaluation of a new fantasy board game by Robert Asprin, the author of the *Thieves' World* series on which the game is based.

Sanctuary by Mayfair Games Inc. (Box 5987, Chicago, IL 60680) is a game for two to five players that takes place in a city of that name. This same city appears in some of Asprin's novels, namely: *Thieves' World* (1979), *Tales of the Vulgar Unicorn* (1980), *Shadows of Sanctuary* (1981), *Storm Season* (1982), and, later this year, *Face of Chaos*. In 1982, *Shadows of Sanctuary* won a Balrog fantasy literature award at Foolcon on April 1st in Overland Park, Kansas City.

Sanctuary is a backwater outpost at the southern end of the Rankan Empire. Originally settled by escaped slaves, the city is now a refuge for petty criminals and down-on-their-luck adventurers. The emperor's younger brother was sent to be the new military governor of Sanctuary and with his five elite guards, called Hell-Hounds, he tries to reduce crime in Sanctuary.

A map of the city appears in all four books in the series. A slightly modified version of it makes up the game board. The birds-eye view of the town shows a three-dimensional, full-color representation of Sanctuary with the walled governor's palace at the northern (top) end.

Each area of the city is connected by streets divided into spaces on which you move your pawn (representing your thief). Starting spaces for the five Hell-Hounds (black pawns) and six sewer entrance points are marked on the streets. Twenty important structures, such as the House of Mermaids brothel, the silk merchant's villa, the governor's warehouse, etc., are highlighted and identified. These locations are where thefts may occur during play. The sturdy game map is a six-piece board that interlocks like a puzzle.

Other game components include: 48 cardboard die-cut coins; 4 counters representing thugs; 2 counters representing amulets; 2 six-sided dice for moving your pawn; 1 ten-sided die for moving any Hell-Hound pawn to chase your opponents; 52 Rumor cards; 50 Event cards; and for the advanced version, 4 Weapon cards and 6 Thief character cards. The rules folder consists of a four-page story with background information, seven pages of instructions, and eight pages of rumor results for the three types of players in the advanced game: burglar, mugger, and pickpocket.

The object of the game is to be the first player to amass 300 silver pieces. Although each player starts

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with 50 silver pieces, it's not easy to reach that goal. A typical turn has each player draw an Event card, roll all three dice, move his thief pawn, move a Hell-Hound pawn, and collect silver for a successful theft. Just as fate plays a strong role in the books, the cards in the game that you draw can dramatically aid or hinder you. Some of these cards include: "Mug Opponent" (steal half his silver if you land in the same space) and " 'Borrow' Horse" (add 7 to your pawn's move).

"The game maintains a lot of the 'flavor' of Sanctuary's street encounters and encounters with one another." Asprin explains. "The actual play of the game does a lot to capture the 'feeling' of the city."

Those who try the game first may then want to read the books. And those who have enjoyed the books can experience through the game what it's like to be a thief in Sanctuary. ●

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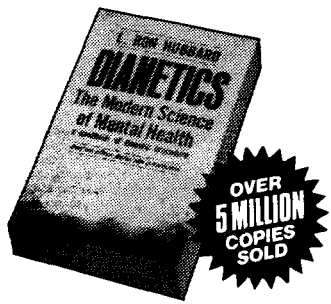

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(from page 26)

SOLUTION TO THE JOCK WHO WANTED TO BE FIFTY

If you try substituting numbers for the three variables in the initial equation, $a = n + d$, you'll find at once that the expression $(a - n - d)$ is equal to zero. When Ophelia canceled $(a - n - d)$ from both sides of an equation she was in effect dividing by zero, an operation verboten in arithmetic because the result has no meaning.

Ophelia's proof is a classic instance of how division by zero can produce false answers. If it were permitted, you could use the proof to show that any variable equals any other variable. Want to prove that a flea weighs the same as an elephant? Just let n be the flea's weight, and a the weight of the elephant.

Ophelia soon talked Lucky out of his plans by threatening never to see him again if he carried them out. He continued to be lucky in algebra class, not just because Ophelia liked him, but also because the university's president sent Ophelia a memo saying that under no circumstances should Lucky be failed. The football team needed him too much.

With this in mind, Ophelia often gave tests with questions based on how she thought Lucky would try to answer them. For example, one of her test questions was to reduce the following three fractions to lower terms:

$$26/65,\ 16/64,\ 49/98.$$

As she anticipated, Lucky lowered the fractions by cancelling out like digits above and below each line:

$$\frac{2\cancel{6}}{\cancel{6}5} \quad \frac{1\cancel{6}}{\cancel{6}4} \quad \frac{4\cancel{9}}{\cancel{9}8}$$

You'll notice that in each case this gives a correct answer! Aside from fractions that equal 1, such as 37/37, or fractions with terminal zeros, like 20/30, there is only one other fraction with 2-digit numerators and denominators for which this illegal cancellation works. See if you can find the fourth example before checking the answer on page 51.

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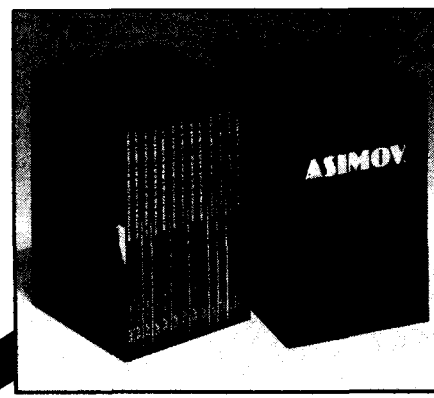

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IAsfm Puzzle #13 by Merl H. Reagle

MARINE MOTIF

ACROSS

1 It watches the skies: abbr.
4 Surrealist painter Joan
8 Letters of credit
11 Fishy SF author T.J.
12 Elvis Presley's middle name
13 Cousteau's "— in Space"
15 Music intervals or liquor amounts
16 Fishy director of "The Invisible Man"
18 Fishy distance (or massive sports network)
20 Father of the atomic age
21 Second song on a single
24 "... — of thee"
25 Fishy world
28 West Point newcomer
31 Bailey
32 Shoe size or scream
33 Used a garden tool
34 Paul Theroux' "— Jack"
35 Have — (know somebody)
36 Planet or peeper
37 Enterprise jaunt
38 Spanish boys
39 Fishy SF author
42 Trireme prop
43 Suzanne Clauser's "— Named Sooner"
44 Ex-footballer Smith
47 Billy Pilgrim's favorite SF writer
52 Fishy SF writer
55 Singer
56 Part of a "Rubaiyat" line
57 Ex-collegian, for short
58 Fishy novelist who wrote "One"
59 Magician in Le Guin's "Earthsea" trilogy
60 Eschew penmanship
61 This place, to Cockneys

DOWN

1 Live off the — the land
2 Nursery-rhyme residence
3 Word on some candy boxes
4 Iranian legislature
5 Dick and Zelazny's "Deus —"
6 Film by Fellini
7 Pressure on an astronaut?
8 "God — bore"— Mencken
9 It doesn't mix with water
10 Treat like a pawn
11 WWII bomber
13 — favor (is indebted)
14 Bret Harte's Chinese card player
17 Charge a house-sitter
19 Forget
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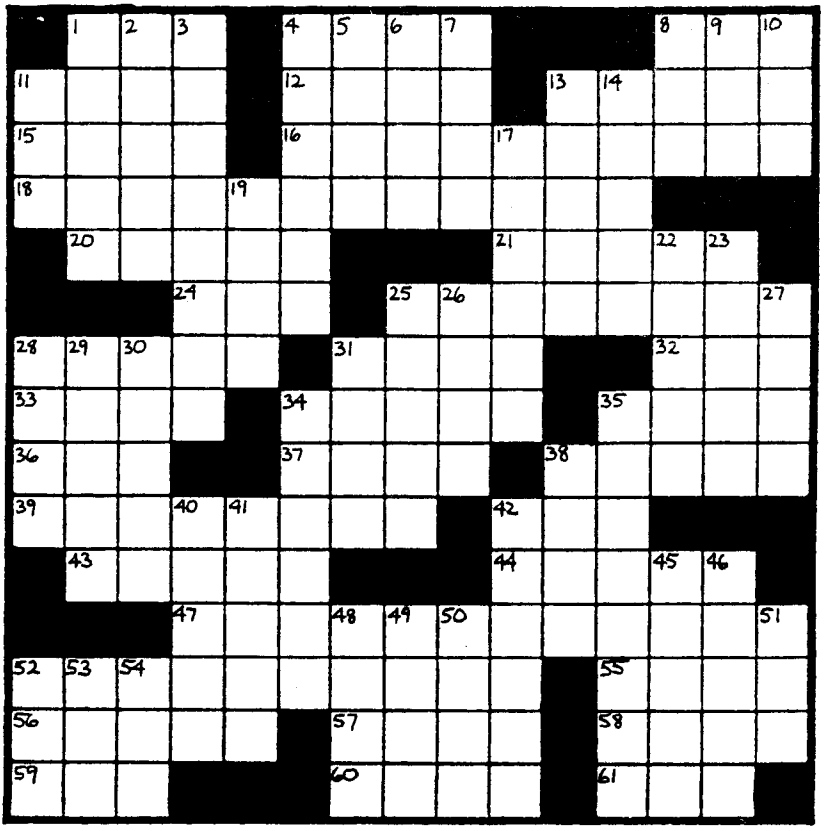

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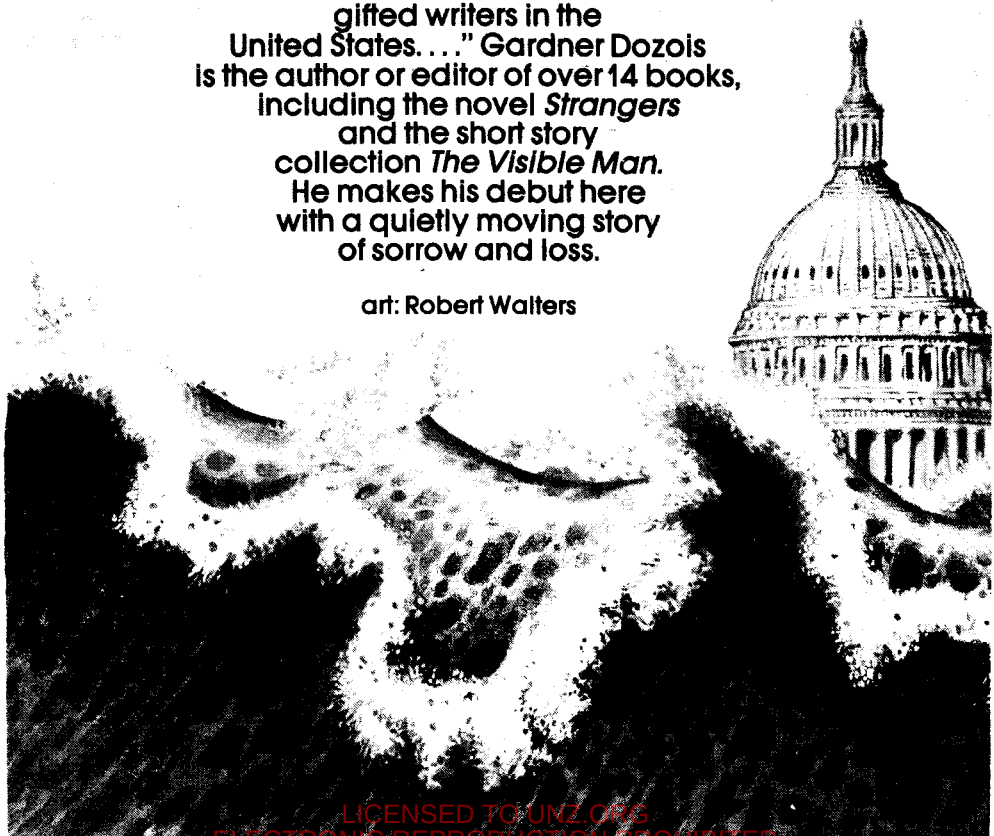
THE PEACEMAKER

by Gardner Dozois

This is the first appearance in this magazine by the author Robert Silverberg called: "One of the most gifted writers in the United States...." Gardner Dozois is the author or editor of over 14 books, including the novel *Strangers* and the short story collection *The Visible Man.* He makes his debut here with a quietly moving story of sorrow and loss.

art: Robert Walters



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Roy had dreamed of the sea, as he often did. When he woke up that morning, the wind was sighing through the trees outside with a sound like the restless murmuring of surf, and for a moment he thought that he was home, back in the tidy brick house by the beach, with everything that had happened undone, and hope opened hotly inside him, like a wound.

"Mom?" he said. He sat up, straightening his legs, expecting his feet to touch the warm mass that was his dog Toby. Toby always slept curled at the foot of his bed, but already everything was breaking up and changing, slipping away, and he blinked through sleep-gummed eyes at the thin blue light coming in through the attic window, felt the hardness of the old Army cot under him, and realized that he wasn't home, that there was no home anymore, that for him there could never be a home again.

He pushed the blankets aside and stood up. It was bitterly cold in the big attic room—winter was dying hard, the most terrible winter he could remember—and the rough wood planking burned his feet like ice, but he couldn't stay in bed anymore, not now.

None of the other kids were awake yet; he threaded his way through the other cots—accidently bumping against one of them so that its occupant tossed and moaned and began to snore in a higher register—and groped through cavernous shadows to the single high window. He was just tall enough to reach it, if he stood on tiptoe. He forced the window open, the old wood of its frame groaning in protest, plaster dust puffing, and shivered as the cold dawn wind poured inward, hitting him in the face, tugging with ghostly fingers at his hair, sweeping past him to rush through the rest of the stuffy attic like a restless child set free to play.

The wind smelled of pine resin and wet earth, not of salt flats and tides, and the bird-sound that rode in on that wind was the burbling of wrens and the squawking of bluejays, not the raucous shrieking of seagulls . . . but even so, as he braced his elbows against the window frame and strained up to look out, his mind still full of the broken fragments of dreams, he half-expected to see the ocean below, stretched out to the horizon, sending patient wavelets to lap against the side of the house. Instead he saw the nearby trees holding silhouetted arms up against the graying sky, the barn and the farmyard, all still lost in shadow, the surrounding fields, the weathered macadam line of the road, the forested hills rolling away into distance. Silver mist lay in pockets of low ground, retreated in wraithlike streamers up along the ridges.

Not yet. The sea had not chased him here—yet.

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Somewhere out there to the east, still invisible, were the mountains, and just beyond those mountains was the sea that he had dreamed of, lapping quietly at the dusty Pennsylvania hill towns, coal towns, that were now, suddenly, seaports. There the Atlantic waited, held at bay, momentarily at least, by the humpbacked wall of the Appalachians, still perhaps forty miles from here, although closer now by leagues of swallowed land and drowned cities than it had been only three years before.

He had been down by the seawall that long-ago morning, playing some forgotten game, watching the waves move in slow oily swells, like some heavy, dull metal in liquid form, watching the tide come in . . . and come in . . . and come *in*. . . . He had been excited at first, as the sea crept in, way above the high-tide line, higher than he had ever seen it before, and then, as the sea swallowed the beach entirely and began to lap patiently against the base of the seawall, he had become uneasy, and *then*, as the sea continued to rise up toward the top of the seawall itself, he had begun to be afraid. . . . The sea had just kept coming in, rising slowly and inexorably, swallowing the land at a slow walking pace, never stopping, always coming *in*, always rising higher. . . . By the time the sea had swallowed the top of the seawall and begun to creep up the short grassy slope toward his house, sending glassy fingers probing almost to his feet, he had started to scream, and as the first thin sheet of water rippled up to soak his sneakers, he had whirled and run frantically up the slope, screaming hysterically for his parents, and the sea had followed patiently at his heels. . . .

A "marine transgression," the scientists called it. Ordinary people called it, inevitably, the Flood. Whatever you called it, it had washed away the old world forever. Scientists had been talking about the possibility of such a thing for years—some of them even pointing out that it was already as warm as it had been at the peak of the last interglacial, and getting warmer—but few had suspected just how *fast* the Antarctic ice could melt. Many times during those chaotic weeks, one scientific King Canute or another had predicted that the worst was over, that the tide would rise this high and no higher . . . but each time the sea had come inexorably on, pushing miles and miles further inland with each successive high-tide, rising almost 300 feet in the course of one disastrous summer, drowning lowlands around the globe until there *were* no lowlands anymore. In the United States alone, the sea had swallowed most of the East Coast east of the Appalachians, the West Coast west of the Sierras and the Cascades, much

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of Alaska and Hawaii, Florida, the Gulf Coast, East Texas, taken a big wide scoop out of the lowlands of the Mississippi Valley, thin fingers of water penetrating north to Iowa and Illinois, and caused the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes to overflow and drown their shorelines. The Green Mountains, the White Mountains, the Adirondacks, the Poconos and the Catskills, the Ozarks, the Pacific Coast Ranges—all had been transformed to archipelagos, surrounded by the invading sea.

The funny thing was . . . that as the sea pursued them relentlessly inland, pushing them from one temporary refuge to another, he had been unable to shake the feeling that *he* had caused the Flood: that he had done something that day while playing atop the seawall, inadvertently stumbled on some magic ritual, some chance combination of gesture and word that had untied the bonds of the sea and sent it sliding up over the land . . . that it was chasing *him*, personally. . . .

A dog was barking out there now, somewhere out across the fields toward town, but it was not *his* dog. His dog was dead, long since dead, and its whitening skull was rolling along the ocean floor with the tides that washed over what had once been Brigantine, New Jersey, three hundred feet down.

Suddenly he was covered with gooseflesh, and he shivered, rubbing his hands over his bare arms. He returned to his cot and dressed hurriedly—no point in trying to go back to bed, Sara would be up to kick them all out of the sack in a minute or two anyway. The day had begun; he would think no further ahead than that. He had learned in the refugee camps to take life one second at a time.

As he moved around the room, he thought that he could feel hostile eyes watching him from some of the other bunks. It was much colder in here now that he had opened the window, and he had inevitably made a certain amount of noise getting dressed, but although they all valued every second of sleep they could scrounge, none of the other kids would dare to complain. The thought was bittersweet, bringing both pleasure and pain, and he smiled at it, a thin, brittle smile that was almost a grimace. No, they would watch sullenly from their bunks, and pretend to be asleep, and curse him under their breath, but they would say nothing to anyone about it. Certainly they would say nothing to *him*.

He went down through the still-silent house like a ghost, and out across the farmyard, through fugitive streamers of mist that wrapped clammy white arms around him and beaded his face

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with dew. His uncle Abner was there at the slit-trench before him. Abner grunted a greeting, and they stood pissing side by side for a moment in companionable silence, their urine steaming in the gray morning air.

Abner stepped backward and began to button his pants. "You start playin' with yourself yet, boy?" he said, not looking at Roy.

Roy felt his face flush. "No," he said, trying not to stammer, "no sir."

"You growin' hair already," Abner said. He swung himself slowly around to face Roy, as if his body was some ponderous machine that could only be moved and aimed by the use of pulleys and levers. The hard morning light made his face look harsh as stone, but also sallow and old. Tired, Roy thought. Unutterably weary, as though it took almost more effort than he could sustain just to stand there. Worn out, like the overtaxed fields around them. Only the eyes were alive in the eroded face; they were hard and merciless as flint, and they looked at you as if they were looking right through you to some distant thing that nobody else could see. "I've tried to explain to you about remaining pure," Abner said, speaking slowly. "About how important it is for you to keep yourself pure, not to let yourself be sullied in any way. I've tried to explain that, I hope you could understand—"

"Yes, sir," Roy said.

Abner made a groping hesitant motion with his hand, fingers spread wide, as though he were trying to sculpt meaning from the air itself. "I mean—it's important that you understand, Roy. Everything has to be *right*. I mean, everything's got to be just . . . *right* . . . or nothing else will mean anything. You got to be right in your *soul*, boy. You got to let the Peace of God into your soul. It all depends on *you* now—you got to let that Peace inside yourself, no one can do it for you. And it's so important . . ."

"Yes, sir," Roy said quietly, "I understand."

"I wish . . ." Abner said, and fell silent. They stood there for a minute, not speaking, not looking at each other. There was woodsmoke in the air now, and they heard a door slam somewhere on the far side of the house. They had instinctively been looking out across the open land to the east, and now, as they watched, the sun rose above the mountains, splitting the plum-and-ash sky open horizontally with a long wedge of red, distinguishing the rolling horizon from the lowering clouds. A lance of bright white sunlight hit their eyes, thrusting straight in at them from the edge of the world.

"You're going to make us proud, boy, I know it," Abner said,

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but Roy ignored him, watching in fascination as the molten disk of the sun floated free of the horizon-line, squinting against the dazzle until his eyes watered and his sight blurred. Abner put his hand on the boy's shoulder. The hand felt heavy and hot, proprietary, and Roy shook it loose in annoyance, still not looking away from the horizon. Abner sighed, started to say something, thought better of it, and instead said, "Come on in the house, boy, and let's get some breakfast inside you."

Breakfast—when they finally did get to sit down to it, after the usual rambling grace and invocation by Abner—proved to be unusually lavish. For the brethren, there were hickory-nut biscuits, and honey, and cups of chicory, and even the other refugee kids—who on occasion during the long bitter winter had been fed as close to nothing at all as law and appearances would allow—got a few slices of fried fatback along with their habitual cornmeal mush. Along with his biscuits and honey, Roy got wild turkey eggs, Indian potatoes, and a real pork chop. There was a good deal of tension around the big table that morning: Henry and Luke were stern-faced and tense, Raymond was moody and preoccupied, Albert actually looked frightened; the refugee kids were round-eyed and silent, doing their best to make themselves invisible; the jolly Mrs. Crammer was as jolly as ever, shoveling her food in with gusto, but the grumpy Mrs. Zeigler, who was feared and disliked by all the kids, had obviously been crying, and ate little or nothing; Abner's face was set like rock, his eyes were hard and bright, and he looked from one to another of the brethren, as if daring them to question his leadership and spiritual guidance. Roy ate with good appetite, unperturbed by the emotional convection currents that were swirling around him, calmly but deliberately concentrating on mopping up every morsel of food on his plate—in the last couple of months he had put back some of the weight he had lost, although by the old standards, the ones his Mom would have applied four years ago, he was still painfully thin. At the end of the meal, Mrs. Reardon came in from the kitchen and, beaming with the well-justified pride of someone who is about to do the impossible, presented Roy with a small, rectangular object wrapped in shiny brown paper. He was startled for a second, but yes, by God, it *was*: a Hershey bar, the first one he'd seen in years. A black market item, of course, difficult to get hold of in the impoverished East these days, and probably expensive as hell. Even some of the brethren were looking at him enviously now, and the refugee kids were frankly gaping. As he picked up the Hershey bar and slowly and caressingly peeled the

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wrapper back, exposing the pale chocolate beneath, one of the other kids actually began to drool.

After breakfast, the other refugee kids—"wetbacks," the townspeople sometimes called them, with elaborate irony—were divided into two groups. One group would help the brethren work Abner's farm that day, while the larger group would be loaded onto an ox-drawn dray (actually an old flatbed truck, with the cab knocked off) and sent out around the countryside to do what pretty much amounted to slave labor: road work, heavy farm work, helping with the quarrying or the timbering, rebuilding houses and barns and bridges damaged or destroyed in the chaotic days after the Flood. The federal government—or what was left of the federal government, trying desperately, and not always successfully, to keep a battered and Balkanizing country from flying completely apart, struggling to put the Humpty Dumpty that was America back together again—the federal government paid Abner (and others like him) a yearly allowance in federal scrip or promise-of-merchandise notes for giving room and board to refugees from the drowned lands . . . but times being as tough as they were, no one was going to complain if Abner also helped ease the burden of their upkeep by hiring them out locally to work for whomever could come up with the scrip, or sufficient barter goods, or an attractive work-swap offer; what was left of the state and town governments also used them on occasion (and the others like them, adult or child), gratis, for work-projects "for the common good, during this time of emergency . . ."

Sometimes, hanging around the farm with little or nothing to do, Roy almost missed going out on the work-crews, but only almost: he remembered too well the back-breaking labor performed on scanty rations . . . the sickness, the accidents, the staggering fatigue . . . the blazing sun and the swarms of mosquitoes in summer, the bitter cold in winter, the snow, the icy wind . . . He watched the dray go by, seeing the envious and resentful faces of kids he had once worked beside—Stevie, Enrique, Sal—turn toward him as it passed, and, reflexively, he opened and closed his hands. Even two months of idleness and relative luxury had not softened the thick and roughened layers of callus that were the legacy of several seasons spent on the crews. . . . No, boredom was infinitely preferable.

By mid-morning, a small crowd of people had gathered in the road outside the farmhouse. It was hotter now; you could smell the promise of summer in the air, in the wind, and the sun that beat down out of a cloudless blue sky had a real sting to it. It

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must have been uncomfortable out there in the open, under that sun, but the crowd made no attempt to approach—they just stood there on the far side of the road and watched the house, shuffling their feet, occasionally muttering to each other in voices that, across the road, were audible only as a low wordless grumbling.

Roy watched them for a while from the porch door; they were townspeople, most of them vaguely familiar to Roy, although none of them belonged to Abner's sect, and he knew none of them by name. The refugee kids saw little of the townspeople, being kept carefully segregated for the most part. The few times that Roy had gotten into town he had been treated with icy hostility—and God help the wetback kid who was caught by the town kids on a deserted stretch of road! For that matter, even the brethren tended to keep to themselves, and were snubbed by certain segments of town society, although the sect had increased its numbers dramatically in recent years, nearly tripling in strength during the past winter alone; there were new chapters now in several of the surrounding communities.

A gaunt-faced woman in the crowd outside spotted Roy, and shook a thin fist at him. "Heretic!" she shouted. "Blasphemer!" The rest of the crowd began to buzz ominously, like a huge angry bee. She spat at Roy, her face contorting and her shoulders heaving with the ferocity of her effort, although she must have known that the spittle had no chance of reaching him. "Blasphemer!" she shouted again. The veins stood out like cords in her scrawny neck.

Roy stepped back into the house, but continued to watch from behind the curtained front windows. There was shouting inside the house as well as outside—the brethren had been cloistered in the kitchen for most of the morning, arguing, and the sound and ferocity of their argument carried clearly through the thin plaster walls of the crumbling old house. At last the sliding door to the kitchen slammed open, and Mrs. Zeigler strode out into the parlor, accompanied by her two children and her scrawny, pasty-faced husband, and followed by two other families of brethren—about nine people altogether. Most of them were carrying suitcases, and a few had backpacks and bindles. Abner stood in the kitchen doorway and watched them go, his anger evident only in the whiteness of his knuckles as he grasped the doorframe. "*Go*, then," Abner said scornfully. "We spit you up out of our mouths! Don't ever think to come back!" He swayed in the doorway, his voice tremulous with hate. "We're better off without you,

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you hear? You *hear* me? We don't *need* the weak-willed and the short-sighted."

Mrs. Zeigler said nothing, and her steps didn't slow or falter, but her homely hatchet-face was streaked with tears. To Roy's astonishment—for she had a reputation as a harridan—she stopped near the porch door and threw her arms around him. "Come with us," she said, hugging him with smothering tightness, "Roy, *please* come with us! You can, you know—we'll find a place for you, everything will work out fine." Roy said nothing, resisting the impulse to squirm—he was uncomfortable in her embrace; in spite of himself, it touched some sleeping corner of his soul he had thought was safely bricked-over years before, and for a moment he felt trapped and panicky, unable to breathe, as though he were in sudden danger of wakening from a comfortable dream into a far more terrible and less desirable reality. "Come *with* us," Mrs. Zeigler said again, more urgently, but Roy shook his head gently and pulled away from her. "You're a goddamned fool then!" she blazed, suddenly angry, her voice ringing harsh and loud, but Roy only shrugged, and gave her his wistful, ghostly smile. "Damn it—" she started to say, but her eyes filled with tears again, and she whirled and hurried out of the house, followed by the other members of her party. The children—wetbacks were kept pretty much segregated from the children of the brethren as well, and he had seen some of these kids only at meals—looked at Roy with wide, frightened eyes as they passed.

Abner was staring at Roy now, from across the room; it was a hard and challenging stare, but there was also a trace of desperation in it, and in that moment Abner seemed uncertain and oddly vulnerable. Roy stared back at him serenely, unblinkingly meeting his eyes, and after a while some of the tension went out of Abner, and he turned and stumbled out of the room, listing to one side like a church steeple in the wind.

Outside, the crowd began to buzz again as Mrs. Zeigler's party filed out of the house and across the road. There was much discussion and arm-waving and head-shaking when the two groups met, someone occasionally gesturing back toward the farmhouse. The buzzing grew louder, then gradually died away. At last, Mrs. Zeigler and her group set off down the road for town, accompanied by some of the locals. They trudged away dispiritedly down the center of the dusty road, lugging their shabby suitcases, only a few of them looking back.

Roy watched them until they were out of sight, his face still

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and calm, and continued to stare down the road after them long after they were gone.

About noon, a carload of reporters arrived outside, driving up in one of the bulky new methane-burners that were still rarely seen east of Omaha. They circulated through the crowd of townspeople, pausing briefly to take photographs and ask questions, working their way toward the house, and Roy watched them as if they were unicorns, strange remnants from some vanished cycle of creation. Most of the reporters were probably from State College or the new state capital at Altoona—places where a few small newspapers were again being produced—but one of them was wearing an armband that identified him as a bureau man for one of the big Denver papers, and that was probably where the money for the car had come from. It was strange to be reminded that there were still areas of the country that were . . . not unchanged, no place in the world could claim that . . . and not rich, not by the old standards of affluence anyway . . . but, at any rate, better off than *here*. The whole western part of the country—from roughly the 95th meridian on west to approximately the 122nd—had been untouched by the flooding, and although the west had also suffered severely from the collapse of the national economy and the consequent social upheavals, at least much of their industrial base had remained intact. Denver—one of the few large American cities built on ground high enough to have been safe from the rising waters—was the new federal capital, and, if poorer and meaner, it was also bigger and busier than ever.

Abner went out to herd the reporters inside and away from the unbelievers, and after a moment or two Roy could hear Abner's voice going out there, booming like a church organ. By the time the reporters came in, Roy was sitting at the dining room table, flanked by Raymond and Aaron, waiting for them.

They took photographs of him sitting there, while he stared calmly back at them, and they took photographs of him while he politely refused to answer questions, and then Aaron handed him the pre-prepared papers, and he signed them, and repeated the legal formulas that Aaron had taught him, and they took photographs of that too. And then—able to get nothing more out of him, and made slightly uneasy by his blank composure and the remoteness of his eyes—they left.

Within a few more minutes, as though everything were over, as though the departure of the reporters had drained all possible significance from anything else that might still happen, most of the crowd outside had drifted away also, only one or two people

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remaining behind to stand quietly waiting, like vultures, in the once-again empty road.

Lunch was a quiet meal. Roy ate heartily, taking seconds of everything, and Mrs. Crammer was as jovial as ever, but everyone else was subdued, and even Abner seemed shaken by the schism that had just sundered his church. After the meal, Abner stood up and began to pray aloud. The brethren sat resignedly at the table, heads partially bowed, some listening, some not. Abner was holding his arms up toward the big blackened rafters of the ceiling, sweat runneling his face, when Peter came hurriedly in from outside and stood hesitating in the doorway, trying to catch Abner's eye. When it became obvious that Abner was going to keep right on ignoring him, Peter shrugged, and said in a loud flat voice, "Abner, the sheriff is here."

Abner stopped praying. He grunted, a hoarse, exhausted sound, the kind of sound a baited bear might make when, already pushed beyond the limits of endurance, someone jabs it yet again with a spear. He slowly lowered his arms and was still for a long moment, and then he shuddered, seeming to shake himself back to life. He glanced speculatively—and, it almost seemed, beseechingly—at Roy, and then straightened his shoulders and strode from the room.

They received the sheriff in the parlor, Raymond and Aaron and Mrs. Crammer sitting in the battered old armchairs, Roy sitting unobtrusively to one side on the stool from a piano that no longer worked, Abner standing a little to the fore with his arms locked behind him and his boots planted solidly on the oak planking, as if he were on the bridge of a schooner that was heading into a gale. County Sheriff Sam Braddock glanced at the others—his gaze lingering on Roy for a moment—and then ignored them, addressing himself to Abner as if they were alone in the room. "Mornin', Abner," he said.

"Mornin', Sam," Abner said quietly. "You here for some reason other than just t'say hello, I suppose."

Braddock grunted. He was a short, stocky, grizzled man with iron-gray hair and a tired face. His uniform was shiny and old and patched in a dozen places, but clean, and the huge old revolver strapped to his hip looked worn but serviceable. He fidgeted with his shapeless old hat, turning it around and around in his fingers—he was obviously embarrassed, but he was determined as well, and at last he said, "The thing of it is, Abner, I'm here to talk you out of this damned tomfoolery."

"Are you, now?" Abner said.

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"We'll do whatever we damn well want to do—" Raymond burst out, shrilly, but Abner waved him to silence. Braddock glanced lazily at Raymond, then looked back at Abner, his tired old face settling into harder lines. "I'm not going to allow it," he said, more harshly. "We don't want this kind of thing going on in this county."

Abner said nothing.

"There's not a thing you can do about it, sheriff," Aaron said, speaking a bit heatedly, but keeping his melodious voice well under control. "It's all perfectly legal, all the way down the line."

"Well, now," Braddock said, "I don't know about that . . ."

"Well, I *do* know, sheriff," Aaron said calmly. "As a legally sanctioned and recognized church, we are protected by law all the way down the line. There is ample precedent, most of it recent, most of it upheld by appellate decisions within the last year: Carlton *versus* the State of Vermont, Trenholm *versus* the State of West Virginia, the Church of Souls *versus* the State of New York. There was that case up in Tylersville, just last year. Why, the Freedom of Worship Act *alone* . . ."

Braddock sighed, tacitly admitting that he knew Aaron was right—perhaps he had hoped to bluff them into obeying. "The 'Flood Congress' of '93," Braddock said, with bitter contempt. "They were so goddamned panic-stricken and full of sick chatter about Armageddon that you could've rammed *any* nonsense down their throats. That's a bad law, a pisspoor law . . ."

"Be that as it may, sheriff, you have no authority whatsoever—"

Abner suddenly began to speak, talking with a slow heavy deliberateness, musingly, almost reminiscently, ignoring the conversation he was interrupting—and indeed, perhaps he had not even been listening to it. "My grandfather lived right here on this farm, and *his* father before him—you know that, Sam? *They* lived by the old ways, and they survived and prospered. Greatgranddad, there wasn't hardly anything he needed from the outside world, anything he needed to *buy*, except maybe nails and suchlike, and he could've made them himself too, if he'd needed to. Everything they needed, everything they ate, or wore, or used, they got from the woods, or from out of the soil of this farm, right here. *We* don't know how to do that anymore. We forgot the old ways, we turned our faces away, which is why the Flood came on us as a Judgement, a Judgement and a scourge, a scouring, a winnowing. The Old Days have come back again, and we've forgotten so goddamned *much*, we're almost helpless now that there's no goddamned K-mart down the goddamned street. We've got to go back

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to the old ways, or we'll pass from the earth, and be seen no more in it . . ." He was sweating now, staring earnestly at Braddock, as if to compel him by force of will alone to share the vision. "But it's so *hard*, Sam. . . . We have to *work* at relearning the old ways, we have to reinvent them as we go, step by step . . ."

"Some things we were better off without," Braddock said grimly.

"Up at Tylersville, they *doubled* their yield last harvest. Think what that could mean to a county as hungry as this one has been—"

Braddock shook his iron-gray head, and held up one hand, as if he were directing traffic. "I'm telling you, Abner, the town won't stand for this—I'm bound to warn you that some of the boys just might decide to go outside the law to deal with this thing." He paused. "And, unofficially of course, I just might be inclined to give them a hand . . ."

Mrs. Crammer laughed. She had been sitting quietly and taking all of this in, smiling good-naturedly from time to time, and her laugh was a shocking thing in that stuffy little room, harsh as a crow's caw. "You'll do *nothing*, Sam Braddock," she said jovially. "And neither will anybody else. More than half the county's with us already, nearly all the country folk, and a good part of the town, too." She smiled pleasantly at him, but her eyes were small and hard. "Just you remember, we *know* where *you* live, Sam Braddock. And we know where your sister lives, too, and your sister's child, over to Framington . . ."

"Are you threatening an officer of the law?" Braddock said, but he said it in a weak voice, and his face,when he turned it away to stare at the floor, looked sick and old. Mrs. Crammer laughed again, and then there was silence.

Braddock kept his face turned down for another long moment, and then he put his hat back on, squashing it down firmly on his head, and when he looked up he pointedly ignored the brethren and addressed his next remark to Roy. "You don't have to stay with these people, son," he said. "*That's* the law, too." He kept his eyes fixed steadily on Roy. "You just say the word, son, and I'll take you straight out of here, right now." His jaw was set, and he touched the butt of his revolver, as if for encouragement. "They can't stop us. How about it?"

"No, thank you," Roy said quietly. "I'll stay."

That night, while Abner wrung his hands and prayed aloud, Roy sat half-dozing before the parlor fire, unconcerned, watching the firelight throw Abner's gesticulating shadow across the white-washed walls. There was something in the wine they kept giving

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him, Roy knew, maybe somebody's saved-up Quāāludes, but he didn't need it. Abner kept exorting him to let the Peace of God into his heart, but he didn't need that either. He didn't need anything. He felt calm and self-possessed and remote, disassociated from everything that went on around him, as if he were looking down on the world through the wrong end of a telescope, feeling only a mild scientific interest as he watched the tiny mannequins swirl and pirouette. . . . Like watching television with the sound off. If this was the Peace of God, it had settled down on him months ago, during the dead of that terrible winter, while he had struggled twelve hours a day to load foundation-stone in the face of icestorms and the razoring wind, while they had all, wetbacks and brethren alike, come close to starving. About the same time that word of the goings-on at Tylersville had started to seep down from the brethren's parent church upstate, about the same time that Abner, who until then had totally ignored their kinship, had begun to talk to him in the evenings about the old ways. . . .

Although perhaps the great dead cold had started to settle in even earlier, that first day of the new world, while they were driving off across foundering Brigantine, the water already up over the hubcaps of the Toyota, and he had heard Toby barking frantically somewhere behind them. . . . His dad had died that day, died of a heart-attack as he fought to get them onto an overloaded boat that would take them across to the "safety" of the New Jersey mainland. His mother had died months later in one of the sprawling refugee camps, called "Floodtowns," that had sprung up on high ground everywhere along the new coastlines. She had just given up—sat down in the mud, rested her head on her knees, closed her eyes, and died. Just like that. Roy had seen the phenomenon countless times in the Floodtowns, places so festeringly horrible that even life on Abner's farm, with its Dickensian bleakness, forced labor, and short rations, had seemed—and was—a distinct change for the better. It was odd, and wrong, and sometimes it bothered him a little, but he hardly ever thought of his mother and father anymore—it was as if his mind shut itself off every time he came to those memories; he had never even cried for them, but all he had to do was close his eyes and he could see Toby, or his cat Basil running toward him and meowing with his tail held up over his back like a flag, and grief would come up like black bile at the back of his throat. . . .

It was still dark when they left the farmhouse. Roy and Abner

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and Aaron walked together, Abner carrying a large tattered carpetbag. Hank and Raymond ranged ahead with shotguns, in case there was trouble, but the last of the afternoon's gawkers had been driven off hours before by the cold, and the road was empty, a dim charcoal line through the slowly-lightening darkness. No one spoke, and there was no sound other than the sound of boots crunching on gravel. It was chilly again that morning, and Roy's bare feet burned against the macadam, but he trudged along stoically, ignoring the bite of cinders and pebbles. Their breath steamed faintly against the paling stars. The fields stretched dark and formless around them to either side of the road, and once they heard the rustling of some unseen animal fleeing away from them through the stubble. Mist flowed slowly down the road to meet them, sending out gleaming silver fingers to curl around their legs.

The sky was graying to the east, where the sea slept behind the mountains. Roy could imagine the sea rising higher and higher until it found its patient way around the roots of the hills and came spilling into the tableland beyond, flowing steadily forward like the mist, spreading out into a placid sheet of water that slowly swallowed the town, the farmhouse, the fields, until only the highest branches of the trees remained, held up like the beckoning arms of the drowned, and then they too would slide slowly, peacefully, beneath the water. . . .

A bird was crying out now, somewhere in the darkness, and they were walking through the fields, away from the road, cold mud squelching underfoot, the dry stubble crackling around them. Soon it would be time to sow the spring wheat, and after that, the corn. . . .

They stopped. Wind sighed through the dawn, muttering in the throat of the world. Still no one had spoken. Then hands were helping him remove the old bathrobe he'd been wearing. . . . Before leaving the house, he had been bathed, and annointed with a thick fragrant oil, and with a tiny silver scissors Mrs. Reardon had clipped a lock of his hair for each of the brethren.

Suddenly he was naked, and he was being urged forward again, his feet stumbling and slow.

They had made a wide ring of automobile flares here, the flares spitting and sizzling luridly in the wan dawn light, and in the center of the ring, they had dug a hollow in the ground.

He lay down in the hollow, feeling his naked back and buttocks settle into the cold mud, feeling it mat the hair on the back of his head. The mud made little sucking noises as he moved his arms

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and legs, settling in, and then he stretched out and lay still. The dawn breeze was cold, and he shivered in the mud, feeling it take hold of him like a giant's hand, tightening around him, pulling him down with a grip old and cold and strong . . .

They gathered around him, seeming, from his low perspective, to tower miles into the sky. Their faces were harsh and angular, gouged with lines and shadows that made them look like something from a stark old woodcut. Abner bent down to rummage in the carpetbag, his harsh woodcut face close to Roy's for a moment, and when he straightened up again he had the big fine-honed hunting knife in his hand.

Abner began to speak now, groaning out the words in a loud, harsh voice, but Roy was no longer listening. He watched calmly as Abner lifted the knife high into the air, and then he turned his head to look east, as if he could somehow see across all the intervening miles of rock and farmland and forest to where the sea waited behind the mountains . . .

Is this enough? he thought disjointedly, ignoring the towering scarecrow figures that were swaying in closer over him, straining his eyes to look east, to where the Presence lived . . . speaking now only to that Presence, to the sea, to that vast remorseless deity, bargaining with it cannily, hopefully, shrewdly, like a country housewife at market, proffering it the fine rich red gift of his death. Is this enough? Will this do?

Will you stop now? ●

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(From page 30)

SECOND SOLUTION TO THE JOCK WHO WANTED TO BE FIFTY

The fourth fraction is 19/95. It becomes 1/5 after the two nines are cancelled. For those who are interested, a tougher problem is to prove that there are no other fractions (with two digits above and two below the line) with this curious property.

"If you take 7 from 100 as many times as you can," Ophelia asked her class one day, "what do you get?"

Lucky raised his hand. "I get 93 every time," he said.

FINAL SOLUTIONS TO THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

Here are the solutions to the three number puzzles that were not answered last month.

1. The only other way to get a sum of 666 by inserting three plus or minus signs into 123456789 is:

$$1234 - 567 + 8 - 9 = 666.$$

2. The only way to make 666 by inserting four plus or minus signs into 987654321 is:

$$9 + 87 + 6 + 543 + 21 = 666.$$

3. The only way to make 777 by inserting any number of plus or minus signs into 987654321 is:

$$98 + 7 + 654 - 3 + 21 = 777.$$

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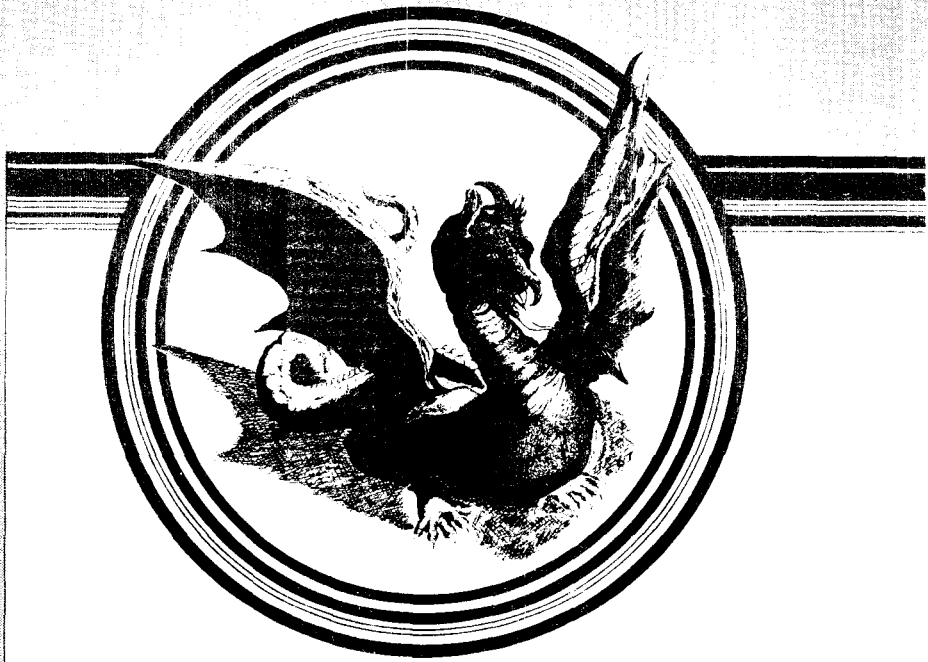

THE DRAGON

art: Denise Cirjak

Hurl yourself from the side of God Mountain;
Find doom no less certain than facing
The dragon.

Scales shimmer greengold, the color of Always,
Eyes brightly blazing the colors of Hell.
Talons festooned with memorialized heroes;
In his multiple bellies, their bodies still swell.

The earth, when his tail falls, resounds like a drum.
His stench turns the fresh winds around him to haze.
When he snorts in hot anger and rattles his tongue
Leap back! Or be consumed in his blaze.

Two hundred meters of foul-smelling greengold,
A half-million kilos and cunning, as well.

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Five thousand years has he ruled o'er a meek world.
An unwelcome repatriate from the Kennels of Hell.

The greatest magicians and warlocks and witches,
The finest astrologers and sorcerors came.
They cursed him and chanted, the poor sons-of-bitches;
Their brave spells but won them a kiss of his flame.

The priests and the ministers all gathered before him,
Praying, they pawed at the air as they dirged.
And when all the exorcists finally had bored him,
By the heat of his dragon breath was their sinful flesh
purged.

And then from above, the dragon heard fury,
From the sky where wings could lift his gross no more.
There, midst the clouds, an eagle was soaring,
Shrieking defiance and promising more.

Came a ragtag mob of unwashed men and women,
The dregs of the earth, scum washed up on the shore.
What little they carried were plowshares and measures
And books—surely these were no weapons of war.

They came thinking only to meet doom as free men.
Before they would suffer his rule one day more.
For one briefest moment, they stood tall and faced him—
And after that moment, there were dragons no more.

Cousin to unicorn, chimera's brother,
Once-mighty magic now but whimsey sustained.
Fettered in Reason, mocked shabby by Logic—
A broken-down tap dancer in a mind's cage,
Has-been entertainer upon a pulp stage.

—St. Marie

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Now that we've solved NASA's problems, I guess we should start work on the perpetual motion machine. . . .

VIEWPOINT

A STROLL TO THE STARS

by Augustine Funnell

The author is a SFWA member who lives in Canada. The long winters there obviously give him time to think silly thoughts.

art: Odbert

It is with the same sort of confident smugness generally reserved for New York Yankee fans anticipating another Yankee/Dodger World Series that I humbly announce the salvation of the space program. Not the discovery of a unified field, nor the construction of a perpetual motion device; not even a better mousetrap. It's healthy, it takes only an hour an evening, and it's legal.

It's walking.

On the evening of June 29, 1981, while out for a stroll past our beleaguered (Canadian) post office, I found a dollar bill ($0.78 US). Naturally I hoped one of the striking postal workers (a contradiction no less hilarious than George Carlin's Military Intelligence) had lost it. Assuming such a thing, I wondered how that dollar, having come from such a disreputable source, might be

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VIEWPOINT

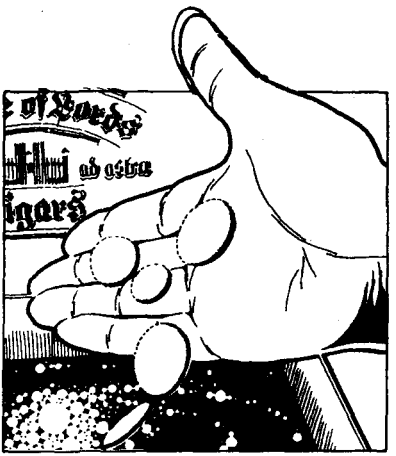
put to good use. What was close to my heart, deserving, and in difficulty?

The space program.

But a dollar? One lousy dollar? Not enough to buy a lock-nut for the Canada Arm. Enough of them, certainly, and we're in business, but one miserable buck ($0.78 US)?

Pondering the problem, I walked further and found a dime and a penny. The solution seemed obvious. Save any and all coins of the realm I found while out for my hour or hour-and-a-half stroll every evening, and at the end of a year, send the accumulated amount to NASA. Hell, I thought, we might even be talking about a whole *case* of Tang!

So in a House of Lords cigar box I saved the coins: the nickles one might ordinarily stoop to pick up if no one happened to be watching, the dimes one would walk several paces to retrieve, and the quarters no one ever passes by. The pennies no one, under any circumstances, ever picks up, I bent and slipped a fingernail beneath, ignoring the amusement of those



"NASA's current workforce is slightly over 22,000 persons. It's estimated that for every job within NASA, two jobs are generated in the private sector. That means more than 66,000 people owe their employment directly to NASA's existence and the continuation of the space program."

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nearby and trying to let no shame show through, for my intent was pure. Whenever I was fortunate enough to find a coin in a pay telephone return slot, it was added to the whole. As were coppers found on barroom floors (humiliation on a large scale, there), nickles dropped to the pavement to roll under cars at parking meters, and dimes frozen in winter ice at bus stops (and me never with anything sharp, trying to scrape away the ice with brutalized fingernails). All of it, every embarrassment-laden cent, went into the House of Lords cigar box.

Until June 29, 1982, when it was ceremoniously emptied onto my bed and solemnly counted, penny by penny, nickle by nickle and bill by bill (yes, rare, but it did happen . . . I once found $4 in bills in the post office lobby . . . the posties were back at what they called work, but I still hope one of *them* lost it). And the grand total, after a year of an hour's stroll per evening, of checking bubblegum machine coin slots and religiously scanning gutters for the familiar glint of copper beneath the glow of street lights? A magnificent $19.51! In just one year! (The scoffers and the skeptics will be quick to point out that $19.51 ($15.22 US) is hardly a sum to get excited about. But they'd still be flopping about in the sea and trying to escape killer plankton if their kind were heeded.)

So how to put the $19.51 to work? Well, according to Leon N. Perry, NASA's Public Information Officer, NASA's current workforce is slightly over 22,000 persons. It's estimated that for every job within NASA, two jobs are generated in the private sector. That means more than 66,000 people owe their employment directly to NASA's existence and the continuation of the space program. Now if each of those 66,000 people went for a one-hour walk every night for a year, and each found $19.51 ($15.22 US), NASA's coffers would be enriched by $1,287,660.00 ($1,004,374.80 US). And this doesn't include spouses and children old enough to realize the

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VIEWPOINT

importance of their sacred obligation! (Admittedly some would find less than my current record of $19.51, but some would find more, wouldn't they?)

Okay, so that's a good start. But we want NASA drenched with money. Mr. Perry also informs me that a stunning 82 percent of the American people believe Shuttle development will allow experiments with new pharmaceutical products that can help cure disease. Eighty-two bleedin' percent! My 1977 printing—the 15th edition—of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (citing the 1970 Census) lists the population of the United States as 203,211,926. Now if the 82 percent that can see beneficial results from the Shuttle got off their duffs for an hour a night and saved all the shiny and not-so-shiny coppers they found for a year, then sent that money to NASA, we're talking about something like $3,196,039,942.34 (a lot US). That's nearly 3.2 *billion* dollars, *in one year!* Compare that to NASA's 1983 budget of a miserly 6.7 million, and examine the results from the two budgets, and realize we'd be seeing an Alpha Centauri edition of *Dangerous Visions* in ten years.

So off your butt, America, and off yours too, Canada. We'll walk our way to the stars. And if the Silly Senator and his little Proxies don't want to go, we'll leave 'em behind to fuss and fret over why the Dodgers ever left Brooklyn in the first place.

One final note: I never did send that money to NASA . . . y'see, after all that walking, I needed this pair of shoes. . . .

(I would like to point out that the facts, including the $19.51 ($15.22 US) are accurate . . . only the conclusions are absurd! And thanks to Stephen Goldin and Leon Perry for their invaluable aid in the preparation of this fantasy.)

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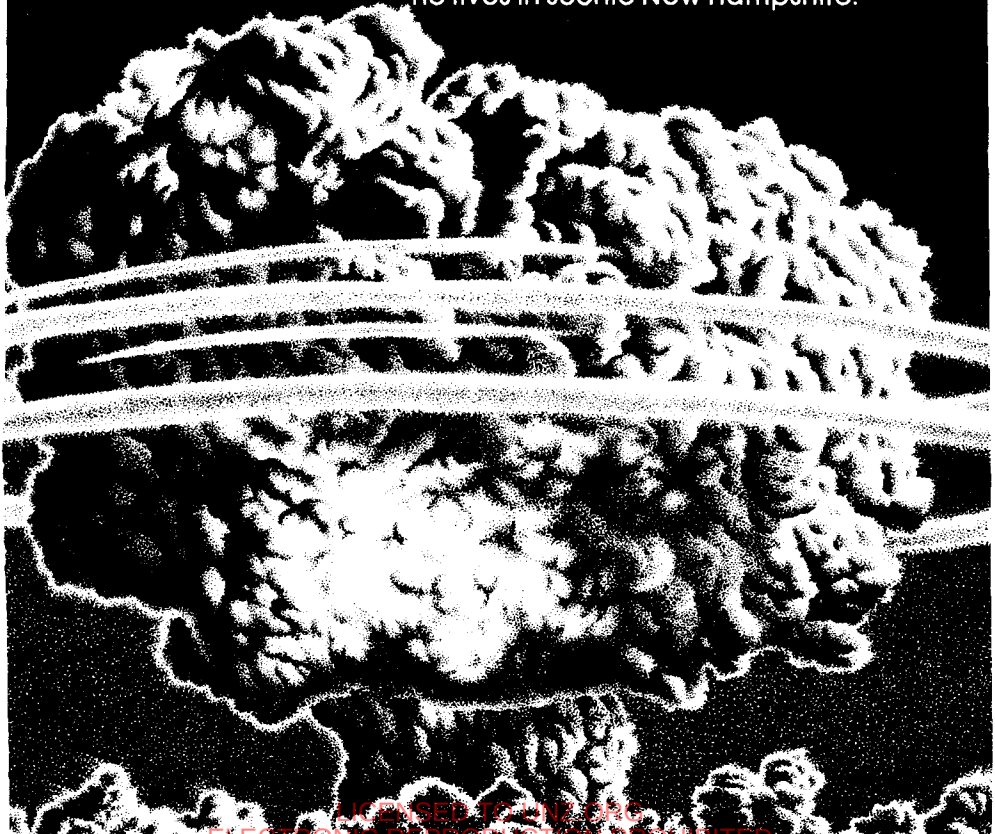
by James Patrick Kelly

STILL TIME

art: Robert Walters

Although this is the author's first appearance in *IASFM*, his work has been published in *F & SF* with some regularity. Like his protagonist, he lives in scenic New Hampshire.



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Quinn Hutchins was planting marigolds on his roof. For two years he had feverishly built his underground dream house into the south flank of Flatrock Mountain. Now that the place was nearly finished he was squandering a little time on landscaping. Judy and Kitty had chosen the flowers; Quinn had grown them from seed in the solar greenhouse. He firmed the seedlings into the ground and pinched off the growing tips to encourage branching. Come July they would make a spectacular display. If July came.

Since the crisis had begun Quinn had seldom been out of earshot of a radio. His multi-band portable Sony was propped against a bale of peat moss. It was tuned to an all-news station in Boston.

"This just handed to me." The news reader paused maddeningly. "The Associated Press reports that the president has left Washington. This unconfirmed—repeat, unconfirmed—report states that the president was flown by helicopter from the White House and arrived at Andrews Air Force Base at ten-thirty-one Eastern Standard Time. There he boarded the National Emergency Command Post, a specially-equipped 747 jet often referred to as Kneecap. His destination is unknown. To repeat. . . ."

"Son of a bitch!" said Quinn. He threw his tools into the wheelbarrow and muscled it down the side of the house to the garage. "God-damned idiots!"

He had hoped for more warning: a parting volley of words in the Security Council, orders putting all available Tridents to sea and dispersing the bombers to auxiliary airfields, perhaps even evacuation of the cities. Kneecap was the penultimate step and Quinn Hutchins's little family was scattered all over Strafford County. If he had not spent most of his sleepless nights planning for just this situation he might have panicked.

Even so, his finger slipped as he dialed Judy's number and he had to start over. Seconds lost.

"Dr. Davidson's office," said Becky the receptionist.

"Judy Hutchins, please."

"Quinn, is that you? How've you been, haven't talked to you in ages. She's with the doctor, you want me to take a message?"

"Get her. Now."

There was a rude clatter on the other end. Becky had always thought him peculiar. Now he did not care what she thought.

"Quinn?" said Judy.

Finally. "Come home." He tried to sound calm. "It's starting."

"Are you sure?" She sounded wary of another false alarm. "It'll mean trouble with Davidson. He's got a full schedule. . . ."

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"Damn it, Judy!"

"And the car has been acting up again. I was going to stop in at Smitty's on the way home and have him look at it."

"There's no time. Just come home. I'm going for Kitty now."

"It's really starting?" Her voice trembled. "All right, I'm coming."

"I love you." He tried not to think about the junkyard water pump in her decrepit Vega. "We're going to make it, sugar."

It was only ten minutes to the Merrymeeting Children's Center; Quinn decided to secure the house before he picked up Kitty. Although the south facade was glazed with sheets of three-quarter inch unbreakable acrylic, it was designed to withstand vandals, not the searing gusts of a thermonuclear wind storm. There were winches concealed in the wall; he thrust a handle into each and cranked furiously. Rolling aluminum shutters reinforced with steel rattled down their exterior tracks and locked shut.

He hurried to the master bedroom, pulled all of the clothes out of the closet and piled them on the bed. The closet was built of reinforced concrete; it served as the airlock for the Hutchins's shelter, a four hundred square foot bunker equipped with hand-operated air and water pumps and a six month supply of dried food. At the back of the closet, surrounded by old shoes, was a green overnight suitcase. Quinn carried it to the kitchen table and unlocked it. Inside were three respirators, a radiation counter, several personal dosimeters, some canisters of mace and two guns. He loaded the thirty-eight special, slipped it into its shoulder rig and strapped it on. The semi-automatic twenty-two caliber light-weight rifle was knocked down and stored inside its waterproof stock. Quinn had trouble reassembling it; he had not practiced for a long time. Judy hated guns.

In his haste to leave he could find nothing to wear over his revolver but an old yellow rain parka. The day was clear and hot but he pulled on the heavy parka anyway. He hid the rifle under the seat of his rusty Toyota pickup, swiped the sweat from his eyes and backed down his dirt driveway onto Flatrock Road.

Once Quinn had owned a Porsche. He had lived within walking distance of Boston Common, bought Medoc wines by the case and earned his luxuries designing shopping malls and corporate headquarters. But Quinn only got to initial the working drawings while the senior partners ate lobster with the clients. His insomnia was just starting then. The nightly news made it worse. When his mother died he sold her house for one hundred and seventy-three thousand dollars—enough to buy his freedom from the un-

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nerving city. He proposed to Judy that they move to New Hampshire. She could finally go back to work; he would stay with the baby and build a house. A house with his name on it, a single-family fortress secure from the madnesses which men were wreaking on the world.

The Merrymeeting Children's Center was located in the basement of the Congregational Church. Quinn was one of its founders; it had been under his direction that a group of parents had worked over several weekends to transform the place with second-hand rugs, temporary partitions, and buckets of bright paint. He had also served on the committee which had chosen Rachel Kerwin as director.

She had shoulder-length red hair and bad teeth. Her wardrobe consisted of a variety of floppy men's clothing culled from second-hand stores. Although she was thirty-seven years old, time had yet to crack her bone-headed idealism. She was a marcher, a letter-writer, a collector of causes. It had not bothered Quinn at all to find out that she had been arrested several times while protesting; it was good for little children to be around people like that.

He had no time for her today. "Where's Kitty?"

"Out." She stooped to pick up a snuffling infant, Billy . . . somebody. "We sent the big kids out on a nature walk. Should be back soon." She tugged at his rain parka and chuckled. "Where you been getting your weather reports from, the Amazon?"

Quinn stepped to the window and scanned the nearby woods. "Damn!" He patted the revolver hidden beneath the parka; it helped steady him. "Do you think I could find them?"

"Why, Quinn?"

"No other parents have come in yet?"

"Why?"

Now she was scared; everyone in Merrymeeting knew that he was a survivalist. "The politicians are scurrying out of Washington like rats leaving a sinking ship."

Billy started to fuss; she jiggled him. "So?"

"So it's coming!" Her obtuseness made him angry. "Turn on the radio and wake up, Rachel! The bombs, don't you understand? We're set to blow ourselves to hell."

"I can't believe. . . ." She shook her head numbly. "There should've been more demonstrations. If people like you had marched instead . . . instead of. . . ."

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"Jesus." He glared at the woods. No sign of his daughter. "I'll wait outside."

She barred his exit. "What's going to happen to these children, Quinn?"

"If we're lucky there should be time for everyone to go home." Quinn liked Rachel Kerwin; when he saw that she was crying he almost fell into the trap of pity. "Look, the nearest target is the Air Force Base in Portsmouth. Forty miles away; the blast effects shouldn't be too bad here. Just start filling every container you have with water. Your biggest worries are fire and fallout. . . ."

The phone rang. Billy Somebody began to cry too. Rachel answered. "Hello. Oh God, Judy. It's horrible, I can't believe it; yes, yes, he's here."

Quinn grabbed the phone from her. "What?"

"Thank God I caught you." Her voice trembled. "The car is dead. I'm at Miller's Drug in Farnham."

He could hardly hear her over little Billy's caterwauling.

"I don't know, I don't know what to do, Quinn. The traffic is all going north; no one is taking the turnoff for Merrymeeting. Should I try hitching anyway?"

"No, don't hitch." He did not want her riding with some panicky loser on a blind run. "Can you steal a car?"

"Quinn!"

"Look, sugar, everything is falling apart. Nothing, nobody matters but us." Rachel tried to butt into the conversation and he turned away from her, twisting the handset cord around his shoulders.

"You're wrong, Quinn," Judy said firmly. Despite all their arguments, she had yet to accept the first law of survivalism.

"Daddy!" Kitty scooted through the door. "I saw your truck, Daddy, look what I found." She waved a blue jay feather at him. "Why are you here so early, can we stop for ice cream on the way home?"

Quinn was momentarily dizzy; he shut his eyes. He was at the edge of control and unless he could slow down he would certainly make the mistake that would kill them all. "Kitty, go to the truck. Now!" There was no time; he wished that someone would strangle little Billy Somebody so that he could think. "Judy? Stay where you are. I'm coming for you. Twenty minutes." He hung up.

Kitty was dawdling by the door. He scooped her up and carried her to the truck. Rachel followed him like a watchdog nipping at the heels of a mailman. She lectured him as if he were responsible for the war.

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"It's not fair. You can't just leave these children to die. You'd better stop and think about what you're doing, Quinn Hutchins. You'd better hope that everyone who survives isn't as selfish as you."

As he loaded Kitty into the truck he saw that her chin was quivering. Although he had been able to ignore Rachel, his daughter had been wounded by her rage.

"Will it be worth it?" Rachel grasped the door handle to keep him from leaving. "Do you think Kitty will thank you tomorrow for saving her life?"

Quinn unsnapped his parka and pulled out the thirty-eight; he did not release the safety. "You want to save those kids inside some misery, Rachel? Shoot them. Now." He offered the butt end of the revolver to her. "You're so damn sure it's not worth living anymore?" He shook it at her and she shrank from him. "Go ahead!"

She turned and ran back to the church.

It seemed quieter than it was inside the truck. The engine boomed, the suspension clattered, the wheels shrieked at the corners but nobody spoke and the radio was broken. Quinn had forgotten the Sony in the wheelbarrow.

Farnham consisted of a boarded-up brick schoolhouse, Ben's Bait and Fruit Stand, Miller's Drug and a scattering of musty cottages. The most direct route climbed over the mountain and passed Quinn's house on Flatrock Road. A tourist from Ohio might finish this scenic drive in forty-five minutes; a drunken teenager with a death wish could do it in a half hour. Quinn thought twenty minutes was about right.

Kitty had tucked her legs beneath her and was scrunched into the far corner of the cab. She was chewing on strands of her long black hair, a habit which usually annoyed Quinn. But she was so pale and wide-eyed that he did not bother her. At least she was not crying. Her father's daughter.

They were about a mile from the house when he finally broke the silence. "I'm letting you off at the driveway, honey. Get into the shelter as fast as you can and wait for us. I'll be back with Mommy in two shakes."

"I won't."

"Kitty."

"I don't want to stay all alone with the bombs."

"I'm not arguing, Kitty. You do it." He downshifted as the truck approached the driveway. "I'm letting you out."

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"I won't go in. I'll stand by the mailbox until you come back."

He had slowed enough to glance at her and gauge her determination. She stared back fiercely, her jaw set. She was six and a half years old and already she had all the pluck she would ever need. He stepped on the accelerator and the truck shot past the driveway.

"Am I going to die, Daddy?"

"Of course not."

"Are Grammy and Grampy going to die?"

"I hope not."

"Lisbeth? Maggie?"

"I don't know."

"How about Rachel?"

"Kitty, anyone who wants to live and tries hard enough will make it."

She considered. "But some people are going to die?"

"Yes."

As they crossed the southern ridge of Flatrock there was a flash of light that overwhelmed the sun. Quinn felt the mountain tremble beneath him. The truck veered toward the shoulder and he slammed it to a skidding stop. Below them were the tidy orchards surrounding Farnham, less than three miles away. In the distance to the southeast was what had once been Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

He had a glimpse of hell out of the corners of his eyes. The fireball was dazzling; it rose with the stately grace of a hot air balloon at a country fair. It seemed to draw the land directly beneath it toward the sky; farther out it cast a shadow of flame. In four thousand million years the dull stones of the planet had never witnessed quite so ravishing a spectacle.

But one glimpse was enough for Quinn; he was nearly blinded. He made a screeching U turn and raced back the way he had come. He hoped that the top of the ridge might afford some protection from the shock wave. He saw a dirt track running into a rock-strewn pasture and pulled onto it, crashing through the wooden gate. Safe from falling trees.

"Out!" He flung open his door and, dragging Kitty with him, flopped face-down behind a desk-sized boulder.

The thunderclap sounded as if the shout of an angry god had split the sky open. Immediately afterward came a terrible pressure on Quinn's back, as if that same god meant to squash him into the dirt for the sin of being a man. His ears popped; he could not breathe.

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He was not sure how long he lay there; he was revived by Kitty's crying. ". . . hurts."

"What hurts?" He rolled her over. "Kitty!"

"The air hurts."

She had to shout to be heard. A roiling black cloud had filled the sky and a gale blew from the north, stripping the trees. A white birch toppled onto the road as he watched. But his lightweight truck was still upright.

"Let's go."

He opened the green suitcase and they both slid respirators over their faces. He clipped a dosimeter to Kitty's blouse and pushed another into his shirt pocket. Kitty hooked her canisters of mace to her belt without being told. Quinn marvelled at his calmness as he waited for the counter to warm up.

Click, click: Of all his survival gadgets, he trusted this one the least. The instruction booklet, translated from the Japanese, had been nearly incomprehensible with its jabber of phosphors and photocathodes. *Click.* The liquid crystal display read four-tenths of a millirem per hour, thirty times the normal background. Nowhere near lethal levels yet; still an hour, maybe two, before the killing dust began to sift out of the sky. *Click, click, click.* Either way he went, the road might be blocked. A dose of four hundred and fifty rems kills half the population; at six hundred, everyone dies. *Click.* Even now, a few of Quinn's cells were shrivelling, exploding, spewing poisons. Judy. The invisible seeds of cancer.

Even though Quinn's grip on the steering wheel was painfully tight, his arms trembled. He was sucking huge amounts of air through his respirator and still felt out of breath. The wind shrieked at the truck. He blinked, blinked again, and realized that he was crying.

"What am I going to do?" He was thankful that the respirator filtered the sob out of his voice.

Kitty slid across the seat and hugged him. "First we have to get Mommy." She spoke impatiently, as if she thought he had merely forgotten the plan. "Then we stay in the shelter until it's safe to come out."

He pulled back from her so that he could see her face. The rubber mask concealed her nose and mouth but her eyes . . . the eyes. He drew strength from her ignorance.

"Buckle your seat belt." He pulled onto the highway, swerved around the fallen birch and headed for Farnham.

It took twenty minutes to reach the end of Flatrock Road. Quinn

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had to ram one tree out of his way. He passed a wrecked station wagon without stopping. The count was up to six rems an hour and was climbing rapidly.

Route Sixteen was a two-lane highway with big shoulders; four lanes of northbound cars now spilled across it. Most were creeping along; a few had stopped, smoke and steam hissing from under the hoods. Quinn saw one angry driver crash his Trans Am into the rear of a stalled Rabbit. He repeated the attack several times until he had nudged the crumpled Volkswagen down an embankment into an apple orchard. The driver of the dead car scrambled onto the road with a rock, leapt onto the hood of the Trans Am and started smashing the windshield.

Farnham was less than a mile south of the junction of Flatrock Road and Route Sixteen. As luck would have it there was just enough room for Quinn to squeeze by near the southbound shoulder, two wheels on gravel, two wheels cutting through tall weeds. He ignored the chorus of honks and curses from the refugees and sped on.

He quickly discovered, however, that it was the state police, not luck, which had kept the lane clear. A patrol car was blocking his way into town; an angry trooper waved for him to stop. The man had a cut over his right eye and a spatter of dried blood matted to his face. He kept his hand on the butt of his pistol as he approached the truck but he seemed dazed, like a fighter waiting to be knocked out.

"Where the hell you going, Mr. Gas Mask?"

"Farnham, officer. My wife. . . ."

He had already turned away, not listening. He held up his hand to stop a blue van in the nearest lane of traffic. Slowly a space opened in front of it. Northbound.

"You, in there." He waved Quinn toward it.

"Please, officer, my wife is in Farnham and I. . . ."

"Burning." The wind whipped at his hair. "Everything. Get your ass turned around right now."

The space the trooper had created expanded to two, three car lengths and those behind the van began to honk impatiently. The trooper spun away from Quinn's truck and shook his fists at the faces staring from behind closed windows. "Shut up, *shut up*!" The gale overpowered the hoarse voice; only Quinn could hear. "It's too late, damn you! You're all dead anyway."

The revolver seemed to jump into Quinn's hand. He released the safety and held the gun in his left hand just under his open window so that the trooper could not see it.

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He did not want to shoot. He was not turning back.

"No, Daddy." Kitty slid across the seat and tugged at his shirt. The look on her face scared him; he thought she might try to interfere. Get them both killed. He shoved her to the floor on the passenger side. Again she reached out to him, offering her mace. "Please."

"Listen buddy, I'm not going to tell you again. . . ."

Without thinking, Quinn closed his right hand around the cannister, thrust it at the trooper and sprayed a burst into his eyes. He screamed and clutched at his face as if trying to tear it off. Quinn fired another burst, and another, until the trooper had staggered out of range.

Quinn whipped the truck through the space in front of the blue van and managed to scrape between it and the patrol car before the refugees could react. He raced down the shoulder toward Farnham.

He knew that he had taken a foolish risk. The policeman had a gun. And a radio. The effects of the mace were temporary. Quinn should have used the thirty-eight. Kitty climbed back onto the seat, slipped her mace cannister into its holder and hugged him.

Not a single window remained unbroken in Farnham. The wind carried the acrid smell of electrical fire but Quinn could see no flames. Only the old schoolhouse still squatted intact on its stone foundation; its boarded-up facade and rusty civil defense sign seemed to mock the devastation. Ben's Bait and Fruit was a jumble of broken timbers. Miller's Drug had been a ramshackle Victorian roadhouse just waiting for a reason to collapse. The bomb had provided reasons aplenty. The roof had vanished entirely; the front had fallen back into the building, bulging the side walls out at crazy angles. He was astonished to see two women in street clothes, totally unprotected against fallout, standing next to the ruin.

He parked beside them. The counter read thirty-six rems per hour; he shut it off. According to his own dosimeter he had already absorbed a dose of between twenty and thirty rems. Not much time left.

"Lock the doors; I'll be right back."

Kitty watched him take the revolver from the seat and tuck it back into his shoulder rig. He mussed her hair. "It's okay," he said.

The two women were gazing at a broken window. A paint-spattered step ladder was propped against the wall directly beneath it.

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"Anyone in there?"

They looked at him blankly; he could not be heard speaking through the mask into the wind. Reluctantly he pulled the respirator down and let it dangle around his neck.

"We heard shouts before the wind picked up," the younger woman said. "My husband's inside trying to help."

The older woman, who wore a calico kerchief over her mouth like a bandit, approached him as he stepped onto the ladder. "You send my Frank out. He's got a bad heart, you hear? And the traffic—we gotta go."

Quinn slithered feet first through the window and slid over a desk into a tiny office. All the furniture had skidded across the tilting floor to the wall. The office opened onto the wreck of the sales area.

"Hello?"

The room smelled of rubbing alcohol. Shelves had spilled their contents before toppling onto one another. The floor was strewn with candy, broken glass, cheap plastic toys, smashed boxes, magazines and gaudy pills. Greeting cards fluttered in the wind as if in welcome.

"Over here!"

A sweating man stripped to his tee shirt struggled with an enormous tangle of junk: broken plaster, fallen joists and rafters, cotton candy puffs of insulation. A gray-faced man with a paunch sat on a fallen shelf and watched.

"I'm all right," he repeated. "A minute. All right."

The sweating man did not pause in his feverish efforts. "Made it through the shock wave. But the windstorm blew the roof away. They hid in the crawl space. One way in." He kicked at the yellow wooden trap door half buried beneath the pile of debris.

Quinn pried a two-by-four out of the way. "Sure they're alive?"

"Heard 'em. Vent holes in the foundation." Together they flipped a chunk of wall off to one side. "Some of 'em ain't."

"My wife's down there."

He blinked at Quinn. It took just that long for a bond to be formed between them; a fellowship of sympathy and fear, a pact of cooperation. "We'll find her," he said.

Quinn nodded. "Why you here?"

"Neighbor."

They labored with grim intensity until they had cleared away almost everything but a collapsed and immovable assembly of four-by-ten ceiling rafters. They strained at this last mess of wood and plaster.

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"Stuck." The good neighbor grunted. "Got a bar in my garage. Pry some loose first?"

"I'll be all right," said Frank.

"Take him." Quinn gestured at the gray old man.

Left alone, Quinn circled the remaining debris, probing for a point of attack. The beams were too massive; there were too many of them. Not without a bulldozer, he thought as he toyed with the dangling respirator. Reason demanded that he walk away. Quinn was beyond reason.

He felt a thumping underfoot and dropped to his knees on the trap door. "Judy! Are you down there? Judy?"

He thought he heard someone say "Hello." Or was it "Help?" The yellow door was thick and the wind had deafened him.

"Jud-ith Hutch-ins!" he shouted.

"Open . . . no air . . . soon. . . ."

With a strangled moan, Quinn linked hands around the outermost rafter and tried to pull it toward him. The rough edge bit into his hands; muscles in his arms, stomach and calves stretched to their limits. He blocked out pain with anger. It was not fair . . . he had prepared . . . his family . . . damned politicians . . . no time . . . not . . . *fair!*

A berserk power tingled through him. Something popped and Quinn thought he had hurt himself. Three more pops followed in rapid succession as the spikes holding the rafter in place released. It came free with a squeal. Quinn staggered backwards, dragging it out of the way.

Quinn had never witnessed a miracle before. He did not know whether to praise the Lord or his adrenal glands. Whatever the source, his newfound strength could not be denied. He drew an enormous breath and turned to the next rafter.

The second was the hardest, the third was easy. Only three left on top of the door. He tried to lift them all at once. His back spasmed and he reeled away, stumbling over a twisted light fixture.

"Quinn!" The haze of pain lifted. Someone sat him up. He felt a grinding at the base of his spine. Judy kissed him; her face smelled like tears.

The neighbor helped him stand. "This your wife?" he said, grinning.

The rafters still pinned the trapdoor.

"What?" Quinn swayed.

Judy caught him. "Some people were hurt during the shock wave. They needed help, beds. Mrs. LeBeau opened her house, no

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one knew much first aid but me. Then this happened." She hugged him. "I tried to watch for the truck but I was busy and I . . . I didn't think you would come . . . after. . . ."

"Not come?" He did not understand. "You weren't trapped."

The neighbor had wedged his crowbar under one of the fallen rafters and was straining to lift it. "Jesus!" He shook his head. "How'd you do it?"

Judy was staring. "Quinn," she said, "let me see your dosimeter."

He thrust it into his pocket without looking and gave her a quick kiss. "Listen," he said, joining the neighbor, "your only chance is the schoolhouse. If it was a shelter it should have a hand pump. But you'll need food: canned, dried—lots of rice, you understand?" He picked up the bar and rammed it deeper into the pile. "Stay put until the fallout passes. I've got a counter in the truck you can have."

Quinn did not want to die but he could not leave until he had given the strangers trapped below a chance to live. The bomb had changed everything—the survivalists had been right about that. Nothing was certain; a chance was all anyone could expect. Maybe he could bushwhack through the orchards back to Flatrock Road. Maybe.

Judy was pale. "This won't take long," Quinn said. "There's still time." He felt the strength returning to him. "Still time."●

NEXT ISSUE

The September *IAsfm* will lead off with a brand new science fiction story, "Saving Humanity," by Isaac Asimov. We'll also have "Showdown on Showdown," a tale of gambling on a truly cosmic scale, by Ian Watson; a moving story, "Heavenly Flowers," by Pamela Sargent; and "Soulsaver," a look at a Falwellian future in Puerto Rico, by James Stevens. The Viewpoint will be "Superpowers!" by Tom Rainbow. Pick up a copy, on sale August 2, 1983.

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MEMORY

by Michael P. Kube-McDowell

The author tells us that this story makes an even dozen professional SF sales for him, so he feels that he is caught somewhere between novice and fulltime professional status. He reports that he's moving toward the latter with all deliberate speed. He lives in Indiana and is fascinated by science of all varieties.

art: Judy Mitchell

Forgotten anything recently? Yes? How precious a gift—how much I envy you.

I call up the images without effort. Example: warm, bright, early summer day, one of the days when summer on the East Coast is still pleasant. Jan (my bundling companion of three months) and I in her flyer—robin's egg blue, 2143 hours on the repeller drive. We skim along one of the many well-kept country roads in Midlant, the flyer's right-side windows open, the wind busily tying knots in Jan's hair. On my left, a magnificent wild and ungroomed stand of white pine and sassafras (five needles to a bundle and mitten-like leaves, respectively).

No pain yet. It comes to me unedited, in scrupulous detail.

Jan's gate pass defanged the ominous camera-monitored entrance. The drive led us along the fringe of the coppice and up a hill; after cresting the rise, we could see the first of the Institute's buildings.

The road ended abruptly in a modest, half-filled parking lot—if it mattered I could tell you how many flyers, their models. But I will tell it as I live it—the details that matter to me.

"Smaller than I thought," I said, looking up at the brown-and-glass walls. I broke an uneasy silence that had lasted, for all practical purposes, the length of our trip.

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"That's the registration, housing, and administration building," she said. "The labs are scattered around the area—some underground."

"Still think I'm crazy?"

"Of course," she said, getting out.

And perhaps she was right. You see, the Institute—or more properly, the United North American Biological Research Institute, Oster Division—was the human biology experimentation center of North America. Not experimentation on analogs—rats and such—like in the very beginning, nor on computer simulogs like we have now. The UNABRI centers used paid human volunteers.

The knee-jerk liberal fear of such research predominantly taking place on the poor never developed as a reality. As a practical objection, the poor make unsatisfactory specimens for most of the work. As an ethical objection, the researchers must adhere to strict cross-population selection procedures. The scientists here were directly accountable to the Prime Minister. In the first few years of UNABRI he discharged and disgraced several of them for minor violations. Experiments took longer as a consequence, but the results have been better.

I had come to the Institute to register for an upcoming brain biology experiment dealing with memory storage—my testing and contract were past history. Jan's unease about my participation was a bit ironic—I met her soon after I applied. She worked at the Institute as a nutritionist and an assistant to the counseling center.

It's my best guess that she inherited some of her father's prejudices. Her father had fought in the Chamber against the establishment of the Institute, but he was overwhelmed by the science lobby. But I understood his position—in all honesty, the Institute had a finger in almost every biological nightmare or dream of the pre-scientific period. They were working on cloning, birth from artificial wombs, life suspension, genetic engineering and a host of other former fictions.

Like I said, Jan was edgy about my involvement, though she wouldn't contravene her own work by arguing with me. As for myself, I had examined the experiment, and my father had quietly checked on the team of neurologists for me and found their previous work beyond reproach. Dad and I were agreed that it was safe enough if I wanted to do it—and I felt a kind of duty to serve at least once during my life. In fact, I'd used my computer and

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found the chance of serious injury to be less than that from giving blood, back before synthesis.

So I told Jan, anyway. I also thought it would be kind of a kick.

We climbed the stairway to the building and went inside.

"There's the desk where you're going," she said, pointing. "I have to report in at Personnel and then check on my sister."

"Shall I come find you for dinner?" I asked.

"Call me at my room—I don't know what I'll have to be doing. Keep tomorrow night open, though, if you have any choice," she called as she walked away. "There's a party for the suspension people."

"Fine," I said, and approached the desk.

It took two hours to complete all the forms, take another physical, check into my room, and move my luggage. Everyone was friendly—not the forced used-flyer-salesman variety, but a seemingly sincere appreciation for the vols, as they called us. (Later I learned they also called us "pigeons.") My next-door neighbor was a young Canadian named Steve—he'd been here six months and it became clear he would be a great help at easing the transition from civilian to subject.

When the last bag and box was moved, Steve and I sprawled in chairs and relaxed.

"What experiment are you in for?" he asked.

"Dr. Jorgensen's memory study," I answered. "You?"

"I just finished all my pre-testing for the height modification genetics program. They'll take sperm samples for the vitro labs and skin samples for the gene banks next week and then I'm free to go."

"That sounds like a cushy way to earn your fee."

"It was, for two weeks. Since then I've been probed in so many places I've discovered a whole new set of orifices. I've been wired to so many analyzers I'm growing two electrodes"—he pointed to his neck—"just like Frankenstein's monster."

I laughed. "What else is going on here?"

"Not much right now," he said. "The place is pretty empty. Your experiment hasn't really geared up yet. I guess the only thing this month will be the suspension project, starting Saturday."

"How long a suspension?"

"Twenty years. Ten subjects."

"I remember the stir the first successes caused, after that research assistant leaked the story."

"Dr. Mueslin had to get the okay from the Prime Minister himself, I heard. The Space Agency has a big stake in the outcome.

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Did you hear about the finances? They're getting ten thousand a year, invested for them at ten percent interest. There were over 14,000 applicants!"

"Not surprising."

"Those people will wake up to quite a nest egg. Being bankrolled by a company that wants to get in on the sleep-till-your-disease-is-cured racket. You'll have to see this one girl who's going in. Gorgeous! If she gets all that money, what will she need mere men for?"

I laughed again. I liked Steve. It was too bad he was leaving so soon—it would have been nice to know someone other than Jan. We talked—about Canada, about genetics, about women—until we almost missed dinner.

Dinner was good—Jan was doing her job well. In fact, considering that it probably contained a pile of nutritional additives that had all the appeal of dirty sand, she was doing a superb job. At dinner, Steve pointed out his girl to me. She was part of a very loud and motley group of diners. She did not have the blatant sexuality that was popularly required then. She did have full, thick brown hair, with lots of body and highlights, a simple attractive face with an easy, joyful smile, a slender figure with no excesses and apparently no deficiencies. On a purely physical basis, I was attracted to her. In fact, I watched her so intently that I heard Steve laughing at my elbow.

"Memorizing the freckles?"

I nodded, at ease with his ribbing. "It's a shame she's going to be locked away for twenty years."

"A tragedy. At least she won't age much."

We returned to our dinner and our conversation. Two of Steve's friends joined us—a fifty-seven-year-old mechanic from Boston, and a young girl on the staff.

They sat down and introductions were passed around. I've always thought the questions you asked a stranger betrayed some interesting things. As part of the student body in college, the first or second question was invariably, "What's your major?"

Here, as part of the studied body, the standard query seemed to be, "Whose experiment are you in?" and of course, they asked it. The young redhead perked up at my answer. "Aren't you afraid?"

"Of what?"

"Haven't you read the experimental design?"

"Of course. I volunteered because I was impressed by it."

"And you're not concerned with the danger?"

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"I'm not aware of any particular danger," I said, beginning to weary of the exchange.

"If they succeed in blocking the physiological mechanism of suppressed memory—even temporarily—"

"We might go insane, overwhelmed by the psychic pain and trauma we had been so blissfully ignoring," I finished for her. "That's an old fear. And a stupid one."

The girl bristled. "Not to Dr. Jorgensen."

"I've passed all the screenings with good margins—and I've got confidence in the basic toughness of people," I said, and then tried to diffuse the growing tension with a joke. "Besides—it's an adventure. What fun is an adventure if everything is figured out ahead of time?"

The sounds of nearby conversations and the clanking of glassware collided over our table in the silence that followed. "They ought to have a screening program that keeps out people who think this is a game," she said shortly, rising. "Excuse me, Steve."

The mechanic waited until she was out of earshot, then leaned forward. "I'm with you, but I'm trying to get somewhere with her, so I hope you'll forgive me if I go tell her what a buffoon you are."

"Sure," I said, and he nodded and hurried after her.

"Guess I've started a reputation," I said to Steve. "Sorry about offending your friend."

"You've got a right to your opinion. The staff happens to be hypersensitive to that particular one—or were you kidding?"

I thought for a moment before answering. "No. That's at least part of the reason I'm here. I don't take the work lightly, or the good it might do. But I've got to take the dangers lightly, because they're beyond anyone's knowledge and beyond anyone's control. The researchers take reasonable precautions. Anyway, it's the unknown that makes science interesting, right? The rest is just history. The danger is part of what makes being here worthwhile."

Steve looked thoughtful. "I suppose everyone in this room writes off his misgivings one way or another—patriotism, humanitarianism, the god of Science, the God of men." He paused. "We write ours off with bravado."

"We?"

"Oui. Let's go listen to some music."

In the morning the memory subjects and the full team for the experiment met in a small room off the main foyer. Introductions were made with much false geniality—I was sure the researchers would rather be rechecking their preliminaries in a lab some-

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where, where they'd be at ease. I would rather have been in bed, and from the looks I caught sidelong from the other subjects, I suspected I wasn't alone. Still, it was a nice touch. Tenrecs and white mice rarely received such considerations.

When the meeting was over, Jan was waiting outside for me. She handed me an envelope and in the same motion hugged me. "Haven't you found your mailbox yet? This was in it this morning."

I opened the envelope and found the menu for the special diet I should have started at breakfast. "You'll have to show me," I said. "At this rate I'll also miss the start of my experiment. Are you free now?"

"Yes, but I've been called in to work tonight," she said, frowning unhappily. "They're having trouble with the sleeper feed units, and I'm going to miss the party for Chrissy—whom you've never met, come to think of it. She left us before you and I met."

"Yes, you've kept me away from her."

Jan smiled faintly. "With good reason. But I suppose you'll have to be my representative at the party, so let's go meet her. I'm going to go out walking with her for an hour or so—my last chance to see her."

"Last chance before what?"

"Before her experiment starts."

Shortly thereafter, on discovering that Jan's sister Chrissy and Steve's heartthrob were one and the same, I understood. I also gaped, and she caught me at it, smiling. After the introduction, though, I was extraneous in the way that only two women talking can make you; I shifted my weight from one foot to the other, then reminded them I was there by announcing my departure.

"Oh," said Chrissy. "I thought you'd be walking with us."

I glanced at Jan and shook my head. "I have to meet Steve in the gym."

"Then I'll look for you tonight," she said.

I excused myself, marveling as I went at the family's congenital politeness, and headed in the general direction of the gymnasium for my nonexistent meeting with my Canadian acquaintance. My weakness in women has always been scent, and Chrissy's was affecting me in ways Jan surely would have noticed had I stayed around.

After swimming several laps in the big indoor pool, I was relaxed and sleepy, and wandered back to my room for a nap. Steve woke me in time for dinner, and at dinner he was bubbling with self-indulgent delight.

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"Spill it," I said.

"Remember the girl I pointed out?"

"Of course."

"I met her on the lawn this afternoon."

"And?"

"I'm planning to get very depressed when she goes into the tank tomorrow."

"That good?"

"Oh, nothing happened. We just talked a minute—but she affects me. Or had you noticed?"

Laughter spilled across the cafeteria as several people entered, with Chrissy as their center. "I do think I understand," I said, watching her. As Steve twisted around in his seat, Chrissy saw us and waved.

"Let's go over," I said, amazed at my boldness.

"What?"

I picked up my tray. "Let's go sit with her."

Steve was surprised but he followed. Once we had settled in and forgotten a half-dozen quickly-spoken names, Steve and I worked like determined cowboys to cut her out of the herd and gain her full attention. She seemed delighted by the intensity of our attention, treating it as a joke but accepting the flattery.

We had covered the basic facts by the time dinner was ending; that we were hallmates, where we were from, what our job assignments were (she refused to be impressed by my unlimited movement card), what gene pools we had come from, where we had served in the army. In return we learned that she was 19 (she looked older), unattached, coded for entertainer but suspended for the duration of the experiment, a ward of the State. I knew some other things already, from rummaging my filing system for conversations with Jan, and I'm afraid I used them to unkindly make Steve an uninformed third wheel.

Steve, of course, recognized what was happening, and after a pair of fruitless attempts to wrest the conversation back to familiar ground, shot me a baleful glance and excused himself.

Chrissy looked at her watch and frowned. "I probably ought to be thinking about getting ready for the party."

"What time does it start?"

"Nine."

"And how much time do you need to get ready?"

"An hour if I poke along."

"Then come on," I said, taking her hand and standing up. "We

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can enjoy an hour of light, a half-hour of sunset and I'll see you to your door at eight exactly."

My approach or the idea must have struck her well, because she rose without hesitation, a fresh smile springing into life on her face. Interlocking my fingers with hers, I led her out of the cafeteria and onto the sundeck.

"So why are you doing this memory experiment?"

I scratched my head with my free hand. "I can't recall," I said, and though the sally didn't deserve it, she laughed.

"Well, think about it," she said.

"Moneylust," I said. "How about you?"

She let go of my hand and turned away a little. "Regular lust," she said. "I want to give them time to improve the male of the species."

I laughed as if I hadn't noticed the glitch in her demeanor when I'd turned the question back to her. "You think we're due for another vintage year?"

"One can hope," she responded, stopping at the railing of the deck. "Where shall we watch this visual spectacle from? Here?"

"I'd like to see it closer up."

The little wall came down, but I remained curious. Why was she going in? I knew I'd have to turn the conversation serious to find out—if she'd let me. "High ground," I said, pointing to a shrub-dotted hill behind the Institute.

"Okay," she said, taking my hand and starting down the steps.

I've had many intervening years in which to convince myself that her warmth to me had more to do with her anxiety about the long sleep than with who I was. It's logical, but I don't have to believe it. Yes, those were her last hours in a recognizable world; yes, they were dragging for her because the Institute had carelessly left them empty.

But it was we who filled them. We lay in the grass, the scent of Chrissy mingling in my nostrils with the warm dampness of the earth. It seemed correct to lay close together, talking, as though we had one body space, not two—and I'm a stickler for correctness. I felt her anxiety and loneliness as my own, and moved closer, still ignorant of what it was I wanted to protect her from.

"You're not watching the sunset," she said.

"What's happening here interests me more."

"I'm not sure this is what Jan had in mind when she asked you to keep an eye on me."

"She didn't ask."

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"Oh." A pause. "Do you think we could ignore the insects for a while?"

"For however long you'd like." My thought: Is she kidding?

"Let's try," she said, and began to unbutton her blouse. After a while, she let me help. My (hurried) thought: No, she's not kidding.

The bout left us tousled, sweaty, mosquito-bitten, grass-stained and sharing an experience on which trust could be asked for. Somehow it meant more if she would share her thoughts than that she had shared her body.

"Are you afraid?"

"Of going in the tunnel?"

"Is that what you call it?"

"We've done simulations. And they took us under once, for a little while. Have you ever fallen down the stairs in the dark? It's not frightening—but the insecurity is unpleasant."

"Wish you could change your mind?"

"I'm a ward of the state, a mediocre entertainer, an outcast of my family. In the new world I'll be a mediocre entertainer with a vehicle and a bank account. The sex-show variations on Sleeping Beauty are endless."

"And that's why you're here?"

"The thing that rips me up is that I don't *know* why I'm here," she said softly. "My signature is on the papers, my body ready for the chamber in the morning—well, almost ready. But when I look back it seems that I got here by accident. When I chose to give up the right-to-bear earned for me by my father—better watch out, Jan still has hers—well, he rejected me, socially and legally. Then I was coded into an over-supplied class. Jan stayed in contact with me—no one else. So naturally we talked about the work done here. My jobs were nothing to talk about. I wrote my code officer. He approved an application. I fit the subject model for the long sleep. The money is good. And my ties to this world were the weakest they had ever been. I signed." She sighed. "But now my ties are stronger."

"In what way?"

But she had caught a glimpse of my watch, glowing obediently as the sunlight scampered, and she sat up abruptly. "We have to get back," she said, buttoning. "I've got even more need now to freshen up for the party. Will you be there?"

"I will."

"Good," she said, and was gone.

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The cafeteria had been redecorated and darkened by friends of the ten going in the tunnel, and a live band was set up in a corner—an odd lot of young technicians and older scientists. The tables were cleared to the periphery of the room and covered with white cloth. Candles flickered everywhere.

Chrissy's arrival had preceded mine. I found her near the band with some unfamiliar faces.

"Back for more?" she said in my ear as we hugged.

"You look terrific."

"Thanks. I had grass stains on my panties. Isn't it romantic?"

"Keep it quiet; I'll be ostracized. I don't even know, do you like dancing?"

"Let's go. I'll show you."

I taught her one set of steps, she taught me another. We were on the floor for almost every dance, tireless, exhuberent, stopping only to sip cool drinks with names I had never heard—a Tenrec Twist, a Pink Beaker Breaker. The man keeping bar handed me a Double Eureka and assured me, "Two parts formalin. Keeps your liver preserved."

The room was full, a boisterous crush of humanity lubricated with drink and music, yet my outer awareness was limited to one fifty-one kilogram package of woman. My growing inner awareness was that every minute that slipped by brought us closer to what had taken on the dimensions of a horribly painful farewell—and one that I was powerless to postpone or prevent. The more I realized that, the more fiercely possessive of her attention I became. I left her side only to get fresh drinks—we drank to fend off the warmth of the room, not really needing their effect. Although it's heresy, people in love sweat, too.

It was late in the evening before we broached the subject that had me at least, clinging to my partner with a kind of desperation. Until we talked, I was confident of her feelings, too.

"It's not long now," she said as we rested at a small table. "I see Dr. Halley and Mr. Tilden are here to see we get to bed on time."

"You seem calm."

"All night I've asked myself what we could do to change things. At last I've admitted to myself there's nothing."

"But I . . ."

She covered my mouth with her hand.

"It's been a wonderful day—but only a day. Is it worth hurting so long for the memory of having said certain words—making

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commitment? Please—let's not talk about it. Will you get me another drink?"

I hesitated a moment, then rose and pushed my way through the crowd. Before I could make my request of the barkeep, Steve sidled over and grabbed me by the arm.

"Why are you doing this?" he demanded.

"Doing what?"

"Monopolizing Chrissy. You stole her from the people who planned the party—her friends. I wouldn't repeat some of the things I've heard said about you tonight."

I saw and heard the tension in him, but I was still reeling from my last exchange with Chrissy, and his words glanced off my hide without effect. "She makes her own choices," I said. The first notes of a ballad reached me over the din of party noise, and I pulled away from his near-painful grasp. "It's late. That'll be the last slow song. I've got to get back."

As I moved toward Chrissy, fighting what seemed to be a sudden population explosion on the floor, I saw the gray-haired head cook standing with her—I remembered Jan calling him Kent. I reached them just as Kent and Chrissy were about to join hands—I barely noticed. "Last dance, Chrissy. Let's go," I said.

Kent's hand froze in mid-motion, and then he pulled back. His smile crystallized, then vanished. Chrissy turned towards me, her face unreadable. "You dance," the older man said, turning away, and at that moment I became aware of a half-dozen spectators to our little scene. The hostility I read there finally penetrated my inner fog.

"No, you, please," I said, grabbing one of Kent's hands and one of Chrissy's and pressing them together. "I'm sorry, I've already had mine," I said, my own emotions confusing me. I turned away, oblivious to the noise and headed for an empty table near the corner.

I sat there and watched them dancing—in an old-fashioned waltzlike step, her head resting on his shoulder at times. I couldn't decide how I felt, only knew that I felt it strongly.

Steve arrived to intrude on my brooding stare. "He's been a surrogate father," he said, leaning over the table and blocking my view. "You did a good thing."

"Go away," I said.

"Other people love her, too. They deserve a chance."

"Go away!" I repeated, sharply. He slipped away, and I saw the doctor and the project director moving towards her as the last verse began. Abruptly I realized that I wasn't ready for the end—I

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had been given no sign to build hope on, no signal to end my hope. I had also failed to write down my identification number for her, without which, in the mobile world I occupied, we would never meet again. Could I be sane and serious, I wondered, thinking about a meeting twenty years from now?

The music stopped, and I jumped to my feet. Chrissy was being led out of the club by the director, Mr. Tilden, and surrounded by a gaggle of friends, some cheerful, many tearful. I was only to the middle of the dance floor when she disappeared from view.

I remember starting to push through the crowd when Dr. Halley intercepted me. "Wait," he said. "She's upset enough."

"I have to say goodbye," I said, and began to brush past him.

He flashed a folded piece of paper at eye level. "Read."

I grabbed it and turned my back on him, unfolding it quickly. In the dim red light it was almost unreadable.

"I'll see you at the other end of the tunnel, Doug Williamson (A567503). Don't forget me."

Elevator, going up, I thought, as the tension left me. I remember how good and free the smile felt. "I hope they know their stuff, Doctor." I said, turning back.

"We all do," was his ambiguous response.

It seems as if there should be more to say, more than the single video disc I now have half-filled. I record this twenty years, six months, and eight days after Chrissy went in the tunnel. In ways both large and small it's a different world than it was then. UNABRI is gone; in fact science is in relative disrepute, displaced by the fakirs and psions. I have slipped from government social adjuster to fringe-group historian. And I am middle-aged and graying.

One thing that has not changed is Chrissy's beauty. Pictures of the nine survivors were on the tele six months ago, when they were revived. Though UNABRI is gone, private money was found to complete the term of the experiment. They say now that the survivors aged nearly a year, and comparing the picture in my mind with the one on the screen, I can see the slackening of muscle tone, the faint boniness in some of the faces. But Chrissy's beauty is intact—I know, for the picture in my mind is perfect.

Six months ago, I began trying to contact Chrissy. Dr. Mueslin, still with the project, gently but firmly refused all my requests. I was refused by videophone, hand-delivered letter, telefacsimile, government channels, private entreaties and turned away at the gate to the lab—arrested, in fact, for unauthorized travel. Tonight

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I finally know why. I have cried too much over her, to cry much more, but the ache is very great tonight. I have it taped, but I don't believe I could listen to it again. In any case, there is no need to. The final report on the experiment was published today—in an obscure journal. Not obscure enough for an anti-science press, however. The broadcast I saw reduced it to a scorecard:
Cost: 5.6 million dollars
Number of subjects: 10
Results: One dead. Three insane. Six with memory destroyed.

Chrissy is among the last group.

Dr. Halley called just moments after I saw it. He said that there was some hope that the six might be retrained. He also said that even with the new techniques that had grown out of my experiment, there was no hope of any of them regaining old memories—or feelings. Unused, their memories had simply faded away, like a photograph that has turned white in the sun.

Humans have great capacities for emotion—and adaptation. A persevering toughness. Time heals even such a loss as mine, through the blurring of painful memories and the enhancement of pleasant ones. Or, I should say, for most people. I'm sure the irony of the situation was clear to Dr. Halley. For now both Chrissy and I are victims of experiments that failed. But where her experiment left her mind a dark, memoryless void, mine took away something almost more valuable—the capacity to forget.

I am a memory machine. I remember everything. The warm darkness at the beginning of life, when I lacked the words to describe it—but I can recall the way it felt. I remember my parents arguing over the war in IndoChina. I could give you the exact words—I was two years old. I remember pages from a high school literature book. I can look over a stranger's shoulder on a bus thirty years removed and read a paper I had then only glanced at. I have explored for the limits of human memory and failed to find them. I can freeze, compress, scan, order, and reorder images in my mind. The only thing I have lost in exchange is the ability to shroud or destroy them. I remember things I don't wish to, when I don't wish to.

I remember a promise made on a slip of paper in a darkened room twenty years ago—and a request—and twenty lost years spent waiting.

It's almost funny. Chrissy cannot keep her part of the promise, and I cannot help but do as she asked—"Don't forget me."

I wish I could laugh. ●

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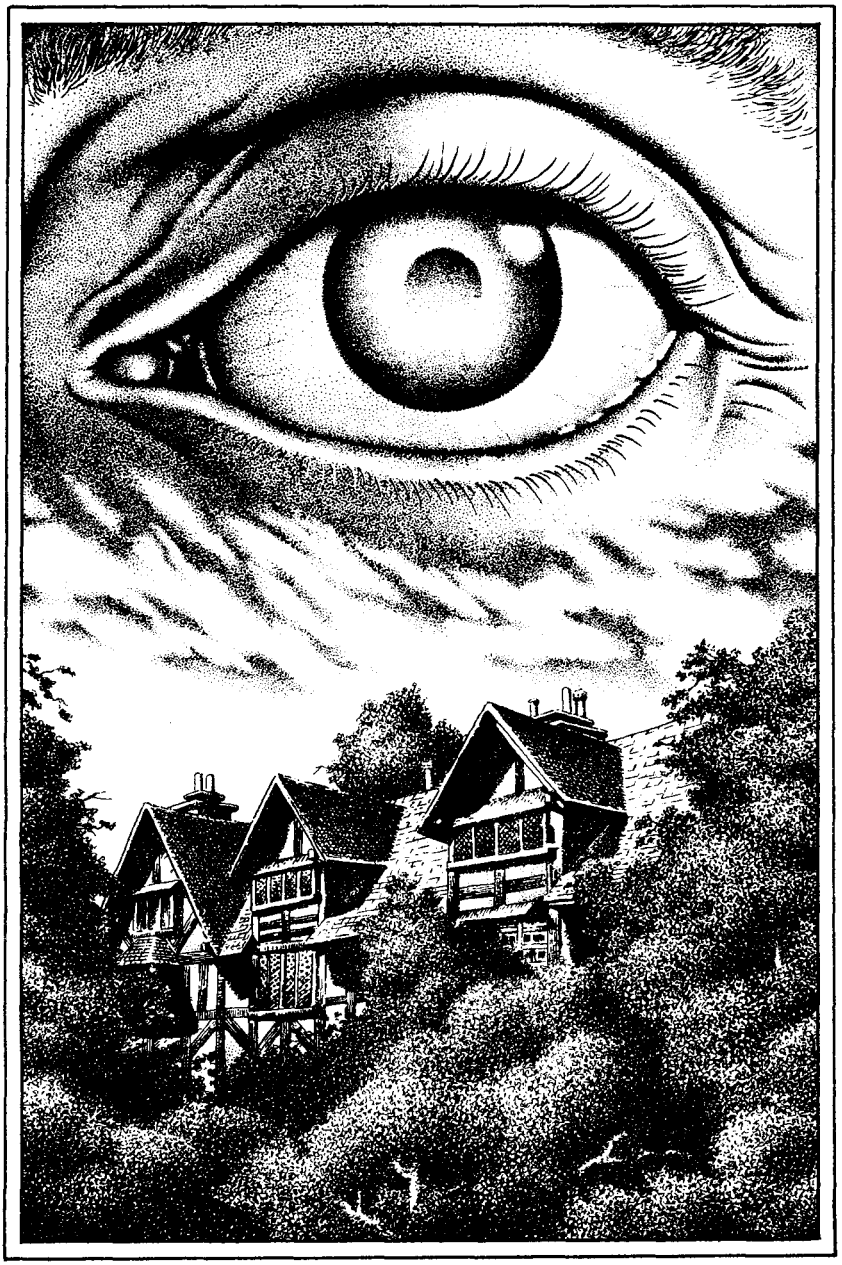

art: Robert Walters

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SCENES FROM THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND

by John Sladek

John Sladek, having discovered the 13th sign of the zodiac, says he is now planning expeditions to look for the East and West Poles. A leading authority on the canals of Mars, the snakes of Iceland and the 1940 Olympics, he devotes the rest of his time to writing (both SF and detective fiction). His *Roderick (or, The Education of a Young Machine)* is being published by Timescape in three volumes, and he has just completed another robot novel, *Tik-Tok*. He lives in a sleepy London suburb where it is usually Sunday afternoon.

Outside the window of the Faculty Lounge, between the great slabs of blind concrete that house University departments, there is a small square of empty green lawn. On the architect's immaculate drawings, this is called 'the Quad', but no one here has ever called it anything, or made any use of it, either. Once 'Corky' Corcoran—but that comes later.

I was looking out of this window while Beddoes talked on and

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on. Out and down, from my privileged perspective, I could see the architect's intention, an arrangement of little trees. I thought of *that* limerick, naturally, but it didn't seem appropriate: It wasn't the Quad, I wasn't God, and all the little trees looked dead. Anyway, Beddoes was sure to quote it himself, sooner or later.

No, I thought—I suppose what I thought was: How stupid to plant those trees down there, where they can't get any light. Even birds are afraid to descend to them, in the shadow of the Philosophy Department, or the Psychology Department, or whatever it is. I'd been here two years, and still couldn't find my way about . . .

The rat's pink nose turned the final corner, came up against a food pellet and stopped. Dr. Smith took a reading from the electric timer.

"Eight point two nine seconds," he announced. "Check this, will you, Latham?"

I read the figures and entered them on my clipboard. "It's very good," I said. "Better than we'd hoped."

"Yes, even Beddoes will have trouble explaining this away. Though no doubt he'll try. All yours, Corky."

Corcoran leaned over the maze, politely waiting for the rat to finish devouring its prize. Then he picked it up and stroked its belly with his thumbs. He crooned over it. "Clever lad. Clever little lad, wait till Beddoes hears about you, eh?" The animal clung to his red beard.

Smith grinned. "That's exactly why I insisted we take every possible precaution against mistakes. We must have strict records, with everything trebly checked. Because, if *we* find it hard to believe, how do you suppose it'll hit the rigid behavioristic mind of Dr. Beddoes?"

Taking the hint, Corcoran turned the rat over and read out its identification number. Smith and I both looked to be sure, then wrote it down, while he returned the animal to the bank of cages across the room.

"Don't forget Ariadne," said Smith.

I opened the black cage suspended above the maze and took her out: the large female rat who acted as our experimental 'transmitter'. Though by now we all knew Ariadne by sight, we now read and recorded her number.

The entire fussy operation bored me. It was meant to be a test for ESP in animals. Dr. Smith had planned it, Corcoran had designed the equipment, so of course they had reason to be excited: It was going well. Since our Paranormal Experience Research

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Group was, as always, short of staff, I acted as observer. The principle was interesting enough, but the laborious details meant nothing—except that I was cutting back on my real work, the Library of Paranormal Experiences. Real work, cataloging letters from the real world, outside the Country of the Blind.

Still, our experiment might pry open a few eyelids. It worked like this: A rat coming to our maze 'cold' would take, on average, fourteen seconds or more to negotiate its blind alleys and find the bait. On a second trial it would be quicker, and so on. After twenty trials or so, the time could be gotten down to two seconds flat.

Pure behaviorism, thus far. But Smith had given it a twist: Ariadne was a rat which had run the maze many times. It hardly ever took her more than two seconds. We put her into a cage suspended a few inches above the maze while other rats did the running.

The cage was painted matte black with a double wire-gauze bottom, and the white maze was brightly illuminated with floodlamps. This made it possible for Ariadne to watch what happened below without being visible. She could see the food pellet and the way through to it, and she was hungry enough to really want to try. We hoped she would communicate a bit of her urgency and purpose to any rat trying to thread the maze.

The idea was to put through twenty rats who had never seen the maze before, giving them one run each. For ten of them, Ariadne would be upstairs, sending down telepathic directions to speed them through—we hoped. The other ten were our control group; she was not in the cage for them.

To isolate possible ESP, we had to eliminate every other difference between the test rats and the controls. They were not to sense the presence or absence of Ariadne by any normal means. This meant not only the black cage of invisibility but other devices developed by the ingenious Corcoran to hide her sound, her scent, even her body-heat from those below.

So far the control rats were behaving as expected, running the maze in about fourteen seconds. But the test rats, clever little lads and lasses, were doing it in eight seconds. To which Smith said, "Statistically significant," and Corcoran said, "Flabbergasting!"

I simply shrugged. Why waste time trying to prove the existence of ESP to other scientists, when the evidence was all about us? Why not instead try finding out more about ESP, more about all psychic phenomena?

So I was bored, while Smith and Corcoran were excited—and

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increasingly on edge. As we prepared to lock up for the night, Corcoran started worrying.

"When I was filling the water dishes, I noticed a draft," he said. "I hope there's no temperature difference between the cages."

Smith raised an eyebrow. "You worry too much, Corky. If it really matters, put a draft-excluder on the door."

"I suppose it doesn't really matter. It's just that—and another thing. Did you know there's a wall mirror behind the bank of cages? What did they design this lab for? Budgies?"

"I'd like to lock up and go," I said. Smith said the same thing, by taking out a pocket calculator and stabbing at its buttons. We stood about with our coats on for some time. Even when Corcoran finally joined us, he was muttering about needing a strip of felt for the door.

"What you need is a drink," I said.

What Corcoran really needed, I now can see, was to let go his death-grip on the material world. He worked too closely with *things*, making and mending, and along the way he lost contact with *people*. For example, he spent far too much time ruling out mazes on cardboard and cutting them out with razor blades. That led to one of his more unpleasant confrontations with Beddoes.

He told Beddoes: "I've made this little model of the Great Pyramid in cardboard. Did you know that if you use a razor blade each day, but keep it under the model pyramid at night, it *never* loses its edge?"

Anyone with sense would never have put it that way to Beddoes, a creature who swam in a private sea of scepticism. Beddoes only said, "Indeed?" but Corcoran couldn't leave it there.

"Indeed," he said. "What do you say to that?"

"It sounds like good news for the manufacturers of cardboard model pyramids, bad news for manufacturers of razor blades. How do you account for it?"

Corcoran leapt at the chance. "Well, we know that metal edges are made of crystals. If they wear down, maybe they can be re-grown. We also know that crystals can be grown, given the proper magnetic fields—"

"Cardboard being a great magnetizer?" Beddoes said. "I see. Well, when I see a properly-conducted test that establishes this 'truth', I'll look into it. Meanwhile I might remind you of one razor which has not needed re-sharpening since the year 1350: Ockham's Razor. That is the principle that one must not look for complex answers until one has failed to find any simple ones."

I was to remember that conversation again.

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Dr. Harry Beddoes could easily have committed murder and escaped punishment, if only because he could not be picked out of an identity parade: He had no face. One might remember his heavy figure, his rumpled grey suit, eyes of some sort peering out through thick glasses, but nothing more. No—there's no other word for it—no soul.

He could be found each evening at six o'clock, blending in to one corner of the Faculty Lounge. With his back to the great window, an ocean of pale green carpet stretching away before him, and an overflow ashtray at his elbow, he was ready to hold court.

The Lounge was like the lounge in any airport: formica tables, chrome chairs, and lines of perspective that leave no place for the eye to rest. Instead the eye would hunt and hunt, as though looking for one's lost relative, but finally alighting only on a blemish in the corner.

We inevitably found ourselves drinking with Beddoes and suffering his little jibes. Smith said it was good for us, having as a kind of devil's advocate a determined sceptic like Beddoes, who was always willing to test our theories, even to destruction.

That evening we talked of Arthur Koestler's latest book on strange coincidences.

Dr. Smith said, "Mind you, I'm not entirely convinced that all these cases are meaningful. But you'll have to admit, some are most intriguing. Take the example of the man who flings himself in front of a London Underground train. It hits him, but does not run over him. Because, at the same instant, some passenger has pulled the emergency handle. The train stops just in time."

Beddoes's eyes widened behind his thick glasses. "If only Koestler knew where to stop," he said.

"Meaning what, exactly?"

Beddoes sighed. "Meaning that the story is a *rumor*, whose only source Koestler seems to have found is a hospital doctor. The doctor wasn't himself at the accident. If we can't get at the facts in a story, why stop at repeating it?"

I said, "I don't follow. What else could he do?"

"One might make it into an even more meaningful story. Say the passenger was a twin brother of the man who threw himself in front of the train. Or say that, the night before, the passenger had a premonition of disaster. He dreamed—"

"Very amusing," Smith said. "You feel, then, that it's a case of 'Don't confuse me with the facts'?"

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Beddoes lit a cigarette and dropped the match on the floor. "I suppose facts can be confusing, if we're speaking of coincidence. After all, is anything irrelevant? The most trivial events suddenly make 'sense', do they not? One man looks into the mirror while shaving and says, 'Today I'll grow a moustache.' A thousand miles away, a second man decides to shave off his moustache, *at the same instant.* Is it all part of the master plan? A law of conservation?"

I started to speak, but he went on:

"Or suppose that I own a beagle, and Corcoran here owns an eagle, and you, Smith, are a bee-keeper. Is the universe trying to *spell* out significance into our meeting here?"

I thought of an odd coincidence: That Corcoran had mentioned a mirror a few minutes before, while Beddoes now chose mirrors and animals for his illustrations. Mirror and animal cage . . .

"All things are possible," I said.

"But not of equal importance, Latham. If they were, we might profitably spend our time looking for messages in every bowl of alphabet soup." He tapped his cigarette in the direction of the ashtray; flakes of ash floated to the carpet. Tidy little mind, messy little man. Beddoes the sower of ashes.

The test series finished and, to my disappointment, Smith suggested waiting a week and then trying to replicate our excellent results. Corcoran busied himself at the drawing board, laying out new maze plans. Smith went back to his book, *New Horizons in Psi.* I went back to my cataloging.

Our Library of Paranormal Experiences consisted of some two thousand letters to be read, filed and, where practical, followed up. I was preparing cross-indices and also trying to keep up with the dozen or so new letters which arrived each week.

Some of them were obviously of no use to us. Now and again we received a demented-sounding letter, often unintelligible and always pathetic: "I am the Holy Ghost my enemys wil soon learn to there distres that my rays of power cannot be gainsaid no cannot be gainsaid . . ." These went into a dead file.

Of course there were also a few practical jokes. One man described a supposed telepathic link with his twin brother. The story ran to several pages, becoming more and more incredible, and ending: " . . . and when they hanged him, I was the one who died!" Ho ho and hum. Fortunately such letters were usually easy to spot from their feebly punning signatures: Vi. B. Rations, E. Espee, Uri Dipple *et al.* found their letters filed in my wastebasket.

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I was tempted to keep the joke letters and analyze them, to try finding out what makes people sneer at psychic phenomena. But I knew the answer already; it was as plain in the scrawl of poor Miss Rations as in the quips of Dr. Beddoes. It was the fear of freedom.

The great majority of our letters, however, came from sane, sincere, reasonably intelligent people. Typically, such a person has had some puzzling, even inexplicable experience: a true dream, a premonition, or meeting a friend by chance in a foreign city. He knows the contents of a telegram before opening it. He finds himself thinking of someone he hasn't seen for years, and they ring him on the telephone. Ghostly visitations, *déjà vu* experiences . . . rarely easy to confirm, but all of it providing a background of evidence that something is going on.

One letter, however, told a story both uncanny and evidential. I read it through twice, then ran down the hall and hammered on the door of Dr. Smith's little office.

"Oh it's you, is it? What's up?"

"Read this," I said. "Our experiment is nothing compared to this!"

He looked at me and laughed. "You should see your face! You look as though you'd just had a psychic experience yourself, Latham."

"I almost feel I've had one, reading this. A letter from a Mr. Durkell. He's seen a village vanish—a complete Tudor town, with smoking chimneys, just fade out of sight!"

"Really?"

"I know it sounds insane, but there's a second witness. What's more, it seems to be connected with the disappearance of a third person. Wait till Beddoes tries blunting Ockham's Razor on this!"

While Smith read the letter through, I watched him: Dr. Efraim Smith, a gaunt, ascetic-looking man of sixty-odd, with a mop of white hair and black, staring eyes. In Hollywood, he could have been cast in the role of an Old Testament prophet.

His appearance, combined with the fact that he preferred writing his books by hand, seated at an old roll-top desk, made him a kind of local eccentric—it was that kind of locality. He had already attracted a few half-joking rumours: Was he a vegetarian? Was it true that he slept only four hours per night?

In reality there was nothing fanatical or eccentric about him. He was a hard-headed practical research chemist, author of a well-known textbook on polymers. Ten years earlier, his brother had died. Dr. Smith had consulted mediums, meeting with the

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usual mixture of disappointing vagueness and uncanny truth. He'd decided to turn his scientific scrutiny upon the entire field of psychic research—in his spare time. Passing interests have a way of becoming vocations, however: he now headed our Paranormal Experience Research Group.

He handed the letter back. "Chilling detail," he said. "Will you be following it up?"

"Of course. If even half of it can be corroborated, it's just what we need. Imagine: A village that doesn't exist, except—"

"Except on Tuesdays!" He shook his head. "Obviously not an hallucination, and too detailed for a mirage."

"Perhaps there's a sort of, well, rupture in the space-time fabric. Could he be looking at a village that exists in some other time or place? Or even some other universe running parallel to ours?"

"Possibly," he said. "After all, our concept of the space-time framework is very hazy indeed. There are a lot of unanswered questions, aren't there? Black holes, for example. Some scientists suspect they are just such 'ruptures' as you describe. If so, it may go some way towards explaining many really puzzling phenomena: a-causal events, such as Koestler's coincidences, begin to make sense if we can discard the notion that causes come before effects in time. Of course it might also explain ESP. Why do we find 'Two minds with but a single thought?' Simply this: Minds are not fettered to local time and place."

We talked for some time. The general theory sounded difficult, but I felt I could grasp it intuitively: *Mind* is not my mind or your mind or Smith's mind, *but a kind of energy ocean in which we, all thinking beings, are immersed.*

"I'd better start checking out the facts in this letter," I said, taking my leave. "By the way, until I've proved it, not a word to Beddoes."

We hadn't meant to tell Beddoes much about our animal experiment, either, until the second series was completed. But one day, while we were only half-finished with the series, Beddoes's smugness broke through even Smith's usual reserves of calm.

The conversation began innocently enough, when Corcoran mentioned Uri Geller.

"Uri Geller?" Beddoes asked. "Ah, you mean the Israeli paratrooper."

Corcoran asked if that was supposed to be a joke.

"Not at all. I understand he was a paratrooper. Amazing. Don't see how he did it."

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Smith showed his teeth in a smile. "Very funny. The implication being that you do see how he managed, during one television performance, to make stopped watches start ticking all over Britain."

"I have an idea, yes. According to a New Zealand study, if you play about with any stopped watch, chances are it will start ticking. In fact, you have about a forty percent chance that it will keep going for a few days. No, it's the parachute jumps that really astound me."

Corcoran winked at me. "Perhaps Dr. Beddoes has psychic insights into how Uri does what he does with spoons. Perhaps we ought to study Dr. Beddoes?"

Beddoes tried imitating Uri Geller's voice. "You want me for a subject? *Me?* But I tell you, I don't know from where I git zis power. From God, maybe. Or my agent."

No one but Beddoes laughed. I said, "Why don't you tell us, once, what you do believe in? If anything."

"Thought-communication," he said. "I think it's a distinct possibility. Of course it's tricky. One makes the right facial expressions, speech sounds and gestures, but it doesn't always get across."

Smith said, "Get your laughs while you can, Beddoes." And he told him about our first series of experiments.

"Ariadne?" Beddoes asked. "Oh, I see. Leading them through the maze. Very good."

Smith grimaced. "I think you'll have to concede that our results look good, as well. I've done a bit of statistical work on them, and I believe that we can rule out chance. The odds are over four hundred thousand to one against the notion that this happened by accident."

Beddoes sowed more ash on the carpet. "I agree. Chance doesn't come into it."

Corcoran looked angry. "Spell that out for me, will you?"

"Gladly. If I hear of a rat that ought to take fourteen seconds to run a maze, but who does it in only eight seconds, I immediately suppose that the rat has some experience of the maze. Has that possibility been ruled out?"

"Completely," said Smith.

Corcoran stood up, knocking over his drink. "You two can sit here listening to veiled accusations of fraud if you like," he said. "I've had enough. Let me out of here."

Fraud? I thought at the time that Corcoran was merely over-

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reacting to Beddoes's stupid question. Later I learned that poor 'Corky' was going mad.

We finished the second series, again with success. Corcoran was oddly silent, depressed. He spent much of his time at the drawing board, laying out plans for many more mazes—far more than we could ever use. He might work furiously for days, then suddenly fling down his pen and slam out the door, saying something about a walk. He'd be gone for hours.

Neither Smith nor I could account for it.

"I think Beddoes has depressed him," I said. "Belittling our work. Corcoran worked hard on this."

Smith looked up from his calculations. "Eh? No, I don't think that's the answer. My guess is, it's the experiment itself that's got to him. You see, he worked so hard, hoped so deeply—and then *it all worked out right.* It's like being a long-term prisoner, and finally having the cell door bang open. The fear of freedom. Let's hope he's over it soon."

But he seemed to grow worse. There was said to have been an incident in the canteen, when Corcoran caught sight of his own face reflected in a spoon and began to scream. I happened to see him on one of his long walks—going round and round the same building.

I remained convinced that Beddoes was at the bottom of it, somehow. I gradually began to see that if I could once crush Beddoes, crack through his hard shell with a harder piece of evidence, Corcoran might begin to see him for what he was. It might help.

Beddoes could not be drawn to comment upon our experiment. The only answer seemed to be to show him the Durkell letter. A story that strange and compelling could not be ignored. I now reread it: Mr. Durkell had seen an article about our group in a Sunday paper. He was sales manager of an electronics firm, and had recently moved to Blenford New Town, whence he daily commuted to work in Casterwich, some ten miles away.

> Mornings I usually take the secondary road, to avoid traffic. One Tuesday I left Blenford as usual, but driving slowly. It was a fine day, I had plenty of time, and the colors of the autumn leaves were too lovely to miss. Then I had the vision.
>
> It wasn't a vision then, only a surprise. On my right, through a small copse, I glimpsed a village. I knew there

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shouldn't be any village just there, so I kept my eye on the spot. After the copse came a large hill, and after that, *no* village! Nothing but empty fields, as always.

I kept watching for it. A week later—Tuesday again—I was bringing my wife along with me (she had shopping to do in Casterwich), when I saw it again. I hit the brakes, backed up and we both took a better look. There was no mistake about it. We could see bits of several half-timbered houses and a smoking chimney. My wife flipped open the road map and found what she thought must be the place, with the strange name of Mons. 'Mons? In England?' I said. 'Let me see that.' But she'd already put the map away again. We didn't look again until we got to Casterwich. Would you believe it, neither one of us could find it! I know my wife is no great mapreader, but we searched the entire area (lower left-hand corner of the map) and found nothing remotely like the name *Mons*.

I couldn't stop wondering about it. Finally I went to the Blenford police. They said they'd never heard of a village called *Mons* in Britain, and that there was no village on that spot, and never had been. I think they thought I was drunk or drugged or crazy!

I investigated a bit on my own. I learned that the place was a pasture belonging to a farmer named Letworthy. I called in to see him. Not only couldn't he help me, he was extremely suspicious. Finally he came out with it: His wife had disappeared! He'd gone to market—on a Tuesday!—and returned to find her gone. When I asked him if he had any explanation, he muttered something about her being carried off by a glacier!

At this point it was all too much for me; I decided I never should know the truth. A vanishing village, a vanishing woman, glaciers and the map business—I just gave up. Shortly after, we moved to Casterwich, so I more or less tried to forget about it. But now and then I still wonder. Especially on Tuesdays!

Yours sincerely,
'F. H. Durkell'

"Is that your evidence?" Beddoes asked, handing the letter back. "And if so, evidence of what?"

I found it hard to put into words. "Evidence that—that the Durkells have seen something that ought not to be seen, by *your*

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laws of science. It's an event that transcends normal explanation. I believe that the Durkells are psychic sensitives, or else that this place is, at times, a psychically sensitive place. There's just no other explanation."

"There are a great many other possible explanations," he said. "Not all correct, of course. Still I believe that it's possible to settle the matter very quickly—if you really want it settled. Shall I look into it?"

"Done," I said. "How much time do you want?"

"That depends," he said. "How much digging have you done already?"

I told him I had written to Durkell, to the Blenford police, and to the local paper. Mrs. Durkell had confirmed her husband's story, and the police remembered his enquiry. The *Blenford Gazette* knew of Mrs. Letworthy's disappearance, but they were taking the police's version of it, that she had simply run away with another man.

"And not a floe of psychic ice?" Beddoes asked. "Curious. But very useful. I think I could clear this up in—shall we say, two hours?"

"Or not at all," I retorted.

"Why not? All things are as you say, possible. But don't expect miracles, if you take my meaning."

I saw Corcoran outside, walking round and round the same building.

"What are you doing?" I asked. "Looking for something?"

He laughed. "Yes. The way out."

I started to leave him but he caught my arm. "Wait a minute, Latham. I want to tell you something. I have a confession to make."

We walked into the deserted 'Quad', sat down on the grass. Corcoran looked at the little half-dead tree and quoted it: the limerick I'd always expected to hear from Beddoes:

> There once was a man who said, God
> Must think it exceedingly odd,
> To find that this tree
> Continues to be
> When there's no one about in the quad.

"Is that the confession?" I said drily. "Because I've heard it."

"Ah, what haven't we all heard? and seen? Especially seen. In

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the mirror. Thoughts while shaving. With Ockham's Razor? No, that cuts both ways. I'd better begin again."

"You'd better," I said. "And try to make more sense."

" 'Take care of the sense and the sounds take care of themselves,' " he quoted. "What's that from? *Through the Looking-Glass*?"

"I think so. But what—"

"But there's more to that title, isn't there: *And what Alice Found there*. The truth?"

"And what is the truth you want to tell me?" I suddenly thought I knew: Corcoran was going to confess that he'd somehow rigged our experiment to make it work. And what might it have to do with mirrors and trees in the quad?

"Mirrors? You'll see about that. Trees in the quad? The point is, out of sight, out of mind; out of mind, out of existence. What happens when no one's about is Nobody's business, right? All right, here's my little story. Through the looking glass, and what Corky found there. Do you remember when I was looking for a bit of felt for the door?"

After a moment, I did. "You were worried about the draught in the lab."

"And I kept on worrying. One evening during the second series, I was in the lab with Smith and I thought of it again. I remembered a door in the hallway that might be a janitor's cupboard or something, and I thought there might be a bit of rag in there. So I excused myself and went to look.

"It wasn't a cupboard at all. It's an observation room. The psychology department must have been using it for experiments before we took it over. You know that wall mirror behind the bank of cages: That's it. One-way glass. Darkly, I was given a vision into the lab. There was Smith messing about the maze." He rubbed his face with both hands and said,

"God forgive me for looking!"

"I don't understand."

"He was running a rat through the maze. The same rat, two or three runs. Training it to build up speed. I kept watching and I saw which cage he returned it to. Next day we took that rat and tested it. Naturally the rat ran the maze in eight seconds. Not psychic vibes at all—just Smith's bloody fraud."

I didn't believe it and I said so.

"Who cares what you believe? Say I'm mad, call me a liar—I still had to tell you. I had to confess, you see? I'm the one who's

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b· ·gered it all up. I peeked—and there wasn't any bloody tree at a·.' There's nothing, do you understand? No bloody tree!"

He leapt up and seized the little tree, trying to uproot it. After a moment of struggling, he gave up.

"Calm down," I said. "Suppose Smith did cheat a little, so what? It's not the end of the world. We know he's got a long and distinguished record as a scientist, and he didn't get that by fraud. He probably just boosted the statistics a bit, to underline our case. There's plenty of other evidence of ESP, after all."

"Yes, and now I wonder how good it is. How many more Smiths are there? No, we're caught in the maze, for good and all. What is there to believe in? The evidence of some Smith somewhere?"

"No," I said. "The evidence inside. We know there's more than this. We know the world is bigger and deeper than it looks on the surface."

"Do we indeed? And how about Dr. Efraim Smith—does he know it? Because if he does, *Why did he think he had to cheat?*"

At six o'clock I faced Beddoes alone in the Faculty Lounge. Corcoran had gone to his room. Smith was being interviewed on local television.

I began abruptly. "Have you found the village of *Mons*?"

"Mons? Oh, the *map* village. Yes, I think so. But it has little to do with what the Durkells saw." Beddoes lit a cigarette. "Except psychologically."

"Hallucinations?" I stared at him until his gaze shifted.

"I think not," he said. "The answer I've got may not be the right answer, but it seems to account for everything. It depends upon a close reading of the letter. 'My wife is no great map-reader,' for example. We must also remember that Mrs. Durkell must have been rather nervous. Her husband, without warning on a deserted country road, had just 'hit the brakes'. Then he shows her a village which, he says, does not exist. She fumbles for a map and finds the name *Mons*. Later they cannot find it. I suggest that the ink of their printed map did not alter in the meantime."

"Because it's 'impossible'?" I asked. He handed me a scrap of paper. I saw it was the corner of a road map, with one word circled heavily: MONS.

"Not the lower left-hand corner," he explained. "The upper right. Notice that all the other place-names but Mons are upside-down. The village is SNOW, and it's in a different part of the county."

I handed it back. "*Snow*. Very suggestive of glaciers. I suppose

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you'll find some map-trick to explain the disappearance of Mrs. Letworthy?"

He smiled, if one can call it that. "No, I think a calendar-trick, this time. Doesn't this Tuesday business strike you as odd?"

"Of course it does."

"Odd, I mean, in the sense that Tuesday is market day? When Mr. Letworthy would likely be absent from his farm?

"Let us assume the police version is correct. Mrs. Letworthy did not 'disappear,' but simply ran away with another man. That means she must have been seeing the man earlier, and she might well have chosen to do so on Tuesdays. Let us make an even wilder assumption: That the man's profession forced him to drive a distinctive vehicle that must not be seen parked near the Letworthy farmhouse."

"Or he might be the man in the moon," I said.

"Quite. Forget him for the moment, then, and look at the letter: 'Mornings I usually take the secondary road,' says Mr. Durkell. That suggests that there is a primary road which he takes of an evening—hurrying home from work."

"Agreed, but so what?"

"It gives us two views of Blenford New Town, where he lives," Beddoes said. "One at his back in the morning, and a possibly quite different view that he faces each evening."

"Oh, it's Blenford that he sees through the trees," I said with some sarcasm. "Looking to his right, he sees a town that is really behind him. It must all be done with mirrors."

"I was just about to suggest that," he said. "The mystery village is not likely an hallucination, and far too clear for a mirage. We are left with one natural explanation: A mirror or something like a mirror is placed behind that little grove of trees every Tuesday."

I had to laugh aloud. Pathetically, Beddoes kept clutching at the wispiest straws of 'natural' phenomena, to avoid facing the obvious truth. In the opposite corner of the Faculty Lounge, a few people had gathered round the TV set. I could hear Smith's voice booming across to us, but I could not make out his words.

Beddoes continued the farce: "Naturally I wondered what kind of large mirror might be portable enough to fit the bill. I sent reply-paid telegrams to Mr. Letworthy, to the local police and to the local weekly newspaper, asking if they knew the profession of the man supposed to have eloped with Mrs. Letworthy. They confirmed what I suspected. The man drove a large van . . ."

The television was making too much noise, and anyway, I found Beddoes's hypothesis boring. In a sense, Smith on television was

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giving him his answer, only Beddoes was too deaf and blind to notice. He droned on: ". . . large sheets of . . . attached to its sides. A kind of portable . . . definitely parked in that spot, behind the little copse. There. Does that possibility fit the facts?"

"Sorry," I said. "I guess I missed the point."

"I said it was common knowledge: Mrs. Letworthy's boyfriend was a *glazier*."

Smith's voice suddenly became louder and clearer: ". . . as in the range of poetic or artistic experience, the mystic sees clearer and deeper, if only at times. Insight—the sudden sunburst of pure understanding. That's what we're concerned with here. Psychic phenomena are only a small part of it, you see."

The interviewer asked if he would call himself a rationalist. "Well, there are rationalists and rationalists, aren't there? Take for example the rationalist answer to Russell's Paradox: 'In this village there is a barber who shaves all of the men who do not shave themselves. But does he shave himself?' You see how it goes: If he does, he doesn't, and vice versa. There's no rational answer, except to say: 'There can be no such village.' But the true mystic, the man of vision, says: 'Why not?' Why not indeed? You see, Man is a paradox in himself. He is apparently finite, yet he can easily conceive of vast infinities . . ."

I suppose it must have been just about that time that poor Corcoran was cutting his wrists with a razor blade.

We all share in the blame for Corcoran's death. I, for sitting and arguing futile theories with Beddoes, instead of staying with him. Smith—if what Corcoran told me was true—for his momentary loss of faith. Beddoes most of all, for hating all that is of a subtle and mysterious beauty, all that he cannot immediately reduce to a petty formula, all that he cannot slash with Ockham's Razor. With his relentless scepticism, he almost certainly drove 'Corky' to the brink of insanity and to his death. This being true, I have had no hesitation in dismissing Beddoes's theory of the vanishing village as simply another of his destructive fantasies. Even without checking, I am sure it is without foundation.

For different reasons, Corcoran's statements about Smith's 'fraud' must also be dismissed. To do otherwise would be to take the word of a hopelessly insane man against that of a reputable scientist with a brilliant record.

Our work carried on, though we now see much less of Beddoes. What would be the point? One cannot explain the incredibly beautiful colors of a sunset to a blind man. ●

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DOUBLES

He's you.
An accordion-fall
of wallet photos, he's repeated,
varied in each of your cells.
This clone shadow,
this potential you:
pluck him out,
make him do all
that you could not—
marry Betty with the mole
and move to the new town,
bear children
so much like you,
where he'll *be* you.
Your parents liked him best,
but you were the dreamer. You
were the one who couldn't remember
a day he wasn't beside you,
inside you being the thoughts
you never became.
He said he cared.
He pointed out the other
ways. You knew
already. You knew
he could have been you.

—Steve Rasnic Tem

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Leo Benson shaved his head bald as a billiard ball because he had decided to kill himself one week from today. He had a perverse desire to see the skull bared, shorn of masquerading foliage. It was as if the act itself was both preparation and catharsis. This, he mused, will be the real me.

Incredible how bizarre I look, he thought. All those women back on Earth with those great bodies—how ridiculous they'd be without their hair too, he reflected. If we shaved our heads, we'd all be equal, our vanity toppled.

Screw vanity.

Screw the women too.

It was 0200 hours. The ship was operating at 0.8 gravity. Leo passed his cocoon on the way from the hygiene station to the

art: Bob Walters

by Terence M. Green

The author is a 35-year-old Toronto native with two sons, ages four and one. His stories have appeared in Canadian and Australian anthologies as well as the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. He teaches English for a living in a Toronto secondary school.

SUSIE Q²

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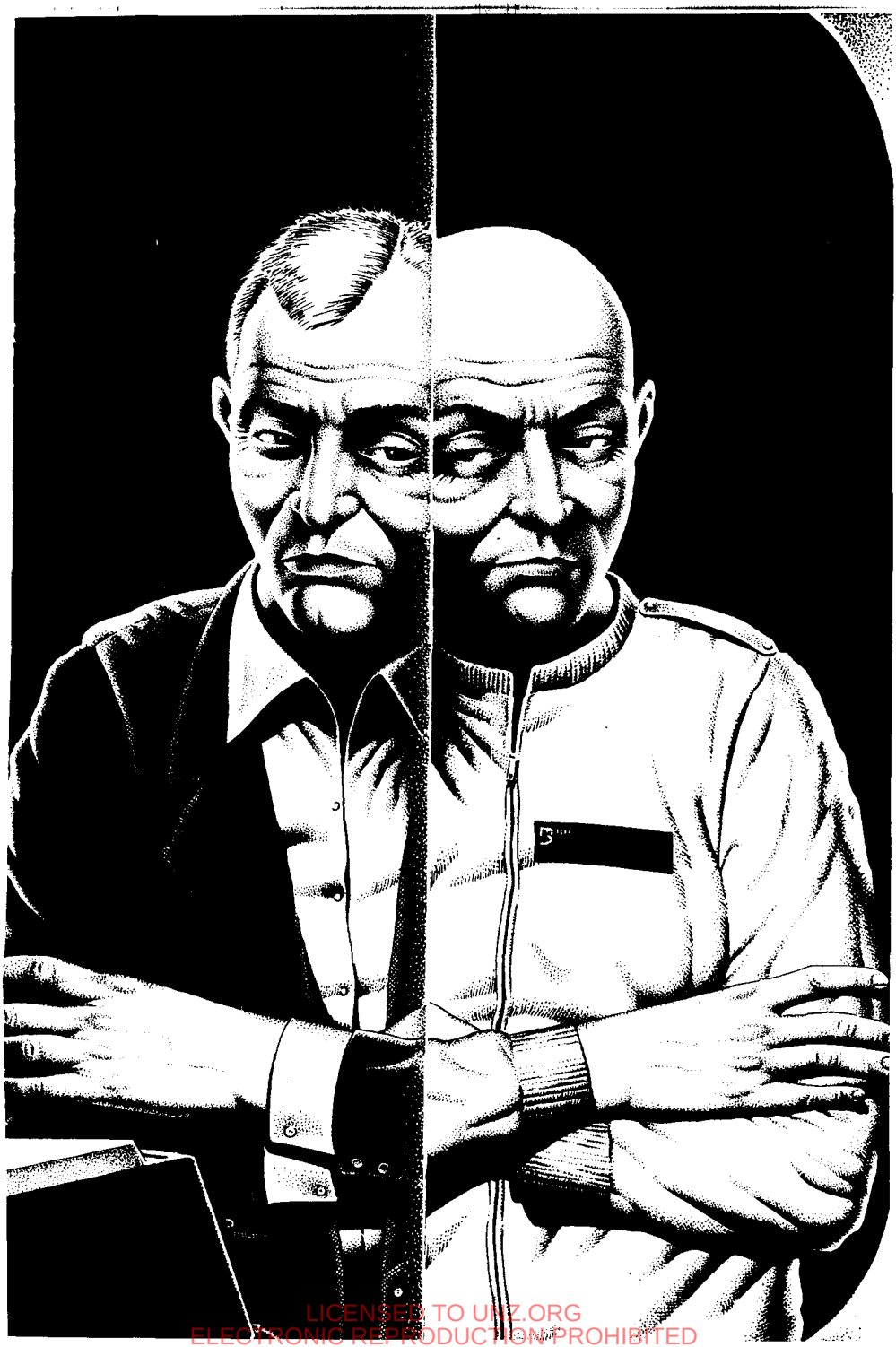

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kitchen, pictured his glistening dome peeping from the cocoon's upper mouth, and laughed.

I need a drink, he thought.

In the kitchen he poured himself a synthascotch and distilled water, popped a calmdown, and sauntered out into the living area. He slouched on the amorphous airsofa, waited for its shape to conform to his, and toasted the emptiness.

"Here's to you, vacuum. And you ship. May you caress one another in eternal harmony." He smiled wryly and ran his hand over the fascinating terrain of his skull, pausing occasionally to fondle a particularly curious protrusion.

Draining his glass, Leo rose and proceeded to the kitchen once more. This time he returned with two drinks and a coffee. Pouring one of the drinks into the steaming mug, he concentrated on it first, saving the second as a necessary chaser.

He settled himself once more into the shifting blue airsofa.

Leo couldn't kill himself for at least a week for a couple of very good reasons. First: he had to check his Wintario ticket after the draw on September 3; top prize was one million dollars. Leo was addicted to the Lottery even though he had never won a thing—ever, anywhere.

But you can't pull the plug while you've still got an unchecked ticket in your pocket, he thought. Gotta cover all the bases. What a ridiculous item he'd appear to be on late nite video—"Dead . . . with a million in his hands!" I can see it now. Further evidence that my life was absurd.

More evidence I don't need, Leo thought.

A second reason for the week's grace was that there were some people he wanted to talk to before blimming himself. Kind of formal farewells.

Good old SUSIE Q^2. My lover, my friend. I can play her like a piano, like a woman. We make beautiful music together. SUSIE *responds*, thought Leo. And she makes sense. Not like people.

He pressed his wristwatch. A miniature, seductive voice chimed, "*It's 0215 hrs., August 28, 2045.*"

Christ, Leo reflected. Forty-eight years old. Child of the bi-millennium. Zipped. Frammed. Gonna blim. One minute I'm flipping hockey cards in the schoolyard, Sister Rosemary ringing the recess bell. The next thing I know the hair on my chest is gray and my hockey cards are gone. Replaced by lottery tickets, time-cards, passports, identicards, landing permits . . .

Leo drank the rest of his synthascotch and distilled water in

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coffee while fingering a curious and unusual depression on his sheared pate.

The airsofa had him buoyed at a 45-degree angle when Leo awoke. It was probably close to "morning." Struggling free, he staggered to the control bubble and gazed out at the emptiness. The stars were brilliant but small. So am I, thought Leo. Small, that is.

Ten days to Earth. Then the mandatory three-week break before returning routinely to Io with further supplies. Then jaunts to Ganymede and Callisto before lighting home to Earth. Then another mandatory three weeks . . .

No. Not this time.

I'll just radio down what I'm doing, park it in orbit, then do it, quiet like. The Company won't even miss a beat. No property damage, minimum fuss. No relatives to notify.

I'll need a drink to talk to Frank. A drink before I caress SUSIE's buttons.

Frank was Leo's brother, his only sibling. Frank had died three years ago.

As was Frank's way in nearly everything, the lump on his side had been neglected with unnecessary foolishness. It had been cancer, and Frank had died ten months later. The last thing he and Leo had done together was take in the hockey game at the Gardens between Russia and Canada for the World Cup. Frank was gaunt by then, his clothes hanging on him. They had gone to Country-Style Donuts on Yonge St. afterward; Frank eventually threw up the donut while clutching the skimmer-meter outside. Leo remembered sitting on the cold curb with him while Frank cried in his arms. Frank was bemoaning the fact that he was finally making $165,000 a year and was only forty, and what a rotten piece of luck it all was. Thank God, he had said, that he never married. Then he wept because he had never married.

That was a Saturday night. Monday he died.

Leo sat down in front of SUSIE Q^2. She awaited his command. SUSIE was everything to Leo. He would miss only her.

The Seagram Universal System Inductive and Extrapolative Quantifier and Qualifier was equipped with video-emergence. One could, therefore, see as well as talk to one's input-construct. SUSIE Q^2 was definitely an expensive toy. If you programmed it with a given set of particulars and a given future-projection, it

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extrapolated, quantified, qualified, and ultimately visually and aurally presented you with the ensuing emergent-construct.

Leo had programmed in Frank's identi-construct as of five years ago. He had then future-projected five years to the present day.

He now pressed SUSIE's memory code for Frank. Frank Benson, as he would look if he were alive today, appeared on the video-screen.

"Good to see you, Leo."

"You too, Frank."

"I won't be talking with you anymore, Frank." Leo paused. "I can't go on."

"What're you talking about?"

"Can't go on. Not interested."

"You quitting?"

"Yeah. Quitting life. I guess I'm a quitter. But you know, if a quitter is someone who doesn't finish, then everybody's a quitter Frank. Nobody finishes."

"Some of them do, Leo."

"Everybody dies."

"Am I dead?"

"I don't know. Are you?"

"I don't feel dead. If you die, nobody'll recall me. Then I'll be dead. Really dead."

"You're already dead, Frank."

"Then who're you talking to? Yourself?"

"Maybe I am."

"But you're not. My physical life may be terminated, but you've reconstructed my electronic life, my potential life. Life is not only Substantial Form. It's also Prime Matter."

Leo shuffled his feet, "Where'd you get all that stuff?"

"I've been thinking about it a lot." Frank ran his hand threw his tousled hair. "I'm Prime Matter now. I'm not dead. I know I'm not." He paused, looked around. "I'm only dead in terms of my relationship with others. If you're dead, I'm dead then—in point of contingency with reality."

Leo's eyes softened. "You've become a philosopher."

"Not much else to do." Frank said, smiling. "But it isn't such a bad fate, you know."

"Where are you when you're not talking to me? I've asked you that before. You've never seemed too certain. This may be the last opportunity I get to know. May be your last chance to articulate it."

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Frank waited a bit, then said, "You kill me if you kill yourself, Leo."

"Aw, Frank, lay off. You're my brother, for Chrissake. I'd never hurt you. Not on purpose. You know that. All I wanted to do was chat a bit before I did it. Formal leavetaking. You know."

"I guess."

"So what do you want to talk about, in this, our last chat?"

"This has caught me a bit by surprise, Leo. In essence, you're asking for something very profound: a man's last words, his last wishes. It's an incredible burden. To say the right thing. To select the proper request. To leave with dignity. An incredible burden . . ."

"You were always smarter than me, Frank. I love you. But I just don't know anymore. I just don't know. I only programmed a handful of people into SUSIE. You were uppermost in my mind. I've always missed you. We were kids together. Slept in the same room. Swapped the same shirts and belts as teenagers. Opened the presents together at Christmas. I can't look at you without a million images igniting in my head in rapid-fire sequence. I want it all to be different, but I don't want anything to change. I get constricted thinking about it when I'm alone. When I talk to you here, the constriction lifts. I needed you on these flights. You've been good for me, Frank."

"And you've given me life."

"I can't believe it's life I've given you. More like a bad joke. A cosmic joke."

Frank smiled again. "Sounds like life to me."

Leo was able to smile in return. "I think your life must be better than mine then."

"No. I don't think so."

"You should ride this ship around the solar system then, gathering deposits for National Mining of North America. Now *that's* a bad joke."

Frank had been only half listening. "I've decided what I want, Leo."

Leo was taken aback. "What?"

"I killed a man once."

"Yes, I know. But it was an accident."

"Accident or not, he's still dead."

"That was ten years ago, Frank. It was a skimmer accident. An *accident*, Frank."

"I know, I know. But the effect was traumatic. *You've* never

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killed anyone, Leo. At least not until you blim yourself. And by corollary, me."

"That's not fair.

"Life isn't fair. Death isn't fair. Fair doesn't enter into it. But you still feel the effects. You pay the price."

Leo was feeling slightly frustrated at the turn in the conversation. "What is it you want then?"

Frank stared straight into his eyes. "Bring him back."

"How, for Chrissake? I can't bring him back!"

"You can. Program his identi-construct, as of ten years ago, into SUSIE Q^2. Give him what you've given me."

"Frank . . ."

"It's what I want. My last request." Frank stared him down.

"How would I get his identi-construct?"

"The N.A. Dept. of Records will have it. His name was Lionel Schoolfair. A strange name. I've never forgotten it." Frank lost himself in thought for a few seconds. "He lived in Toronto. You have the date of his death. It was October 14, 2035, in Toronto. Their computer will feed it into SUSIE Q^2 if you request it. They don't care. You know that. It's nothing to them if you want to indulge in harmless computer games, as they see it."

"What good would it do, Frank?"

"What good did it do to bring me back?" Frank tried for a dramatic pause. "It's what I want. What I need. I killed him. Make him Prime Matter."

Leo shook his head slowly. "None of this is real, you know. You're not bringing him back. Not really."

"Then who are you talking to, Leo?"

"Frank. I love you. That's all I really wanted to say. I don't know what else to say."

"Thanks, Leo. There's nothing else to say. I love you too. It all ends strangely, doesn't it?"

"I guess it has to."

"Think about it, Leo. Program Lionel Schoolfair for me. And don't kill yourself. If you do, you take us all with you. We're in your hands. Literally."

"Good-bye, Frank."

"Think about it. And take care, Leo. Take care."

1100 hours, August 30, 2045.

Leo punched up the word *phrenology* on the ship's central Macrovac. The video printout read: "a theory that the shape of the skull shows what sort of mind and character a person has; practice

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of reading character from the shape of the skull. (< Gk. *phrēn* mind + E - *logy*). See also *phrenetic, phrenological, phrenologist.*"

We're always trying to see what's beneath the surface by examining the surface itself, thought Leo. Can it be done? Looking into a crystal ball after caressing its secrets from it? Trying to know what the other fellow's thinking? Extracting some meaningful data via the senses, hoping it will elicit insight, truth?

He ran a hand slowly along each side of his skull, the fingertips sensitized by his concentration.

In 2020, Leo had taken out a 5-year marriage contract with Phyllis. He had been a romantic 23, she a vibrant, black-eyed beauty of 22. It had been, in unoriginal retrospect, the best of times and the worst of times. Blazing passions, mutual delights, discoveries that seemed their own but of course were not—this had been the stuff of the relationship. But it also contained the hard confrontations, both with selves and partners, that so many people never deal with well.

They failed to renew the contract when it terminated. Phyllis had taken out two further contracts with different partners in the intervening years. Leo had preferred to live alone, avoiding further similar liaisons.

Pouring a healthy dose of synthascotch into his coffee, Leo settled down in front of SUSIE Q^2. His fingers rested on the keyboard, his eyes on the blank video-screen. It was effective night-time: 0330 hours, September 1.

He pressed Phyllis's recall code. Her identi-construct had been entered as of 2022, early in their marriage, and future-projected to the present.

She blossomed onto the screen.

"Hi, Phyllis."

"Leo. I haven't talked with you for what seems like ages. How are you? You're looking haggard. You been sleeping well?"

"No."

"You sick?"

"Not really." He smiled grimly. "If I'm sick, the disease is life. In that case, everybody's sick."

"Oh, I don't know, Leo. I feel OK."

"But are you alive?"

"As much as you are."

"Hardly, Phyllis. Hardly."

"You still haven't answered me. What's the problem? Job got you down?"

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"I'm going to kill myself, Phyllis. Soon. This is the last I'll be talking to you."

There was a mutual silence. Leo felt momentarily faint, solving the light-headedness with a long sip of coffee.

"What can I say, Leo?"

"Don't know. You could say you'll miss me. You could say that I am your Everything. I think I am, you know. Finally."

"But you're not, Leo. My life now is something that defies description. It is rather peaceful. I do a lot of thinking. My thoughts are my life."

"You don't exist," Leo challenged. "I made you up."

"Oh, I exist. I don't know how. But I exist."

"Phyllis is alive on Earth. She's forty-seven years old. She prepares and edits transcripts of Canadian videonews for transferral to Macrovac facilities. She hasn't spoken to me for fifteen years. How can you exist if she exists?"

"I'm not her. Her existence has nothing to do with me. There's no dependence necessary, no intersection of reality points."

Leo shifted uneasily. This was what made SUSIE so stimulating. You could always count on some good intellectual racquetball, he reflected. Phyllis had always managed to take the initiative away from him, however slightly, however unintentionally. Even now.

"Whatever, Phyllis. It doesn't matter, I guess. What matters is that I don't feel any need to go on. I think I've finally come to terms with the Benign Indifference of the Universe."

"Whose phrase is that?"

"It's from Camus."

"Heady stuff, Leo."

"Yeah, well, heady or not, it's accurate."

"You're just depressed. It'll pass."

"No, I don't think so. I've been thinking about it a lot. A lot." Leo paused for her to reply. When she remained silent, he confided further. "Life," he began, "for some, is divided into the Convenient and the Inconvenient. Some of us are no-risk types. I think that's me. I've chosen the Convenient, and the no-risk. My life is a graph without any sudden peaks or depressions. I've liked it that way."

"So why are you going to chop off a life you've liked?"

"I guess 'like' isn't what I want to say. I guess what I mean is that I can't operate any other way, so I feel the route I've gone represents the best one for me. And now I feel it's run its course. It'd be Convenient to end it, before I lose any more physical, emotional, or mental energies."

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"You sound like you're talking yourself into it."

"Don't we talk ourselves into everything?"

"Well, not everything. But you've got a point. Those things that can be rationalized to fit our perceptual habits, beliefs, and prejudices usually will be so rationalized. But the bottom line, Leo, is that suicide is okay by me. I mean, if you're not bothering anyone else, then what's the big deal?"

"I'm glad you see it that way too."

"Of course I do. I'm your wife. And I'm your construct. I love you."

"You're not *my* construct, Phyllis. You're a construct of the immutable laws of mathematical projection. You are what you *had* to become, given the additional factor of isolation from any modifying stimuli."

"You're a modifying stimulus."

"Granted. But I'm the only one. And that I can accept."

"Don't you see that you're the same, Leo? Your job has made you virtually immune to external stimuli too. You've evolved in a vacuum, both literally and figuratively. We're like mirrors. We're identical emergent-constructs."

Leo blinked. He breathed evenly, without facial expression. I think she's right, he mused. I'd never seen it that way. Many things are falling into place. This is why I can love and deal with Phyllis here but couldn't on Earth. I've managed to isolate the experience continuum and control its flow. It was the wild fluctuations that unhinged me, that made me lose Phyllis originally. But *this* Phyllis understands. She knows me—knows that I must live my life with my given genetic and environmental identiconstruct. Too much change disturbs my equilibrium.

Yet life is change. That's why I can't cope, not any longer. I might lose what I have, might be disappointed deeply as time goes on. In fact, I will. I'm coming up for pensioning soon. This is the reality of Leo Benson.

Phyllis interrupted his train of thought. "I understand, Leo. It's okay. To be or not to be *is* the question. The answer varies."

"Thanks, Phyllis."

For some reason, Leo felt bad that Phyllis understood so well.

In response to the request for "Phrenology—additional information," the ship's Macrovac printout read: "The bones of the cranium have thicknesses and air spaces producing exterior unevenness that bears no relation to the underlying cortex; locali-

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zation exists (see *Brain*), but has no connection with external variations in the shape of the head."

No connection? wondered Leo. How can there be absolutely *no* connection between external variations in a given sample of any *genus* and what lies beneath? Any occurrence or fact that is directly perceptible must have some relation to another part of the same whole. It followed, didn't it? No matter how random it *appeared* to be. If one method of acquiring knowledge works for one person, why is it invalidated merely because it fails to suffice for the group? Because we cannot perceive the connection does not, perforce, mean the connection does not exist. The arrogance of Science, as usual, thought Leo. A measurable universe at all costs.

The printout continued: "See A. Bain, *On the Study of Character, including an Estimate of Phrenology*, 1861; J.P. Blackford, *Phrenology for Students*, 1916; J. Coates, *Phrenology*, 1920; W. Asquith, *Phrenology*, 1940; also the *Phrenological Journal*, 1824, *et seq.*"

If nothing else, thought Leo, it was soothing and narcotizing to slide one's fingertips along the craters and moraines of one's skull, searching for cues to one's individuality. This physical effect was not to be underestimated. Surely it ranked parallel to sexual experience in many ways. Probably this is the key. We search for an intellectual rationale for a sensual experience, as a holdover from Puritanism.

Satisfied that he had plumbed some of the curiosities of the shape that was his skull, Leo felt appeased. He punched off the Macrovac and proceeded toward the infratanning and sensurrounding room. On the way, he stopped and picked up his aluminum-framed sunglasses. He and the glasses went a long way back.

0630 hours, September 3, 2045.

I'm nearing Earth orbit, Leo thought over toast, bacon, eggs, and coffee with synthascotch. My final orbit, so to speak. Nice image, thought Leo. Camus would like it.

Only two more people to talk to now, he thought. Alex and Wendy. I'll see them together as usual.

Using both his own identi-construct and Phyllis's of 25 years ago, SUSIE Q^2 had induced, extrapolated, quantified and qualified, and had mathematically and problematically future-projected their potential male and female offspring. Leo had projected them both to age ten. They existed in stasis as they might have existed fifteen years ago.

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Alex and Wendy were the children they had never had.

Leo typed out their recall code and they bloomed onto the video-screen.

"Dad!"

"Hi, Dad!"

"Hi, kids. What's new?"

Alex had his father's broad forehead and cheekbones but his mother's jawline. He was a good-looking kid, thought Leo—solid-boned, with the curly, dark hair he himself had had as a boy. Wendy was her mother in miniature, except for her eyes, which were his, and something about her smile that was all her own. Her coal-black hair was tied back in a pony-tail.

The kids always seemed excited—the animation of youth, thought Leo. The future, for them, was a limitless possibility, not a narrowing funnel of diminishing spirals. Like it is for me.

"You ask us that all the time, Dad," said Alex. "*What's new*?" He giggled. "Why don't you ask us 'What's old?' " Both Alex and Wendy giggled now and rolled their eyes, delighted at their riposte.

Goddamn, he thought. Kids. Look at me. I'm smiling. They're incredible.

"Okay, then," he countered, "how about this: What's the difference between an elephant and a giraffe?"

The children waited, eyes dancing, faces alive with anticipation. "What?" they cried, almost in unison.

Leo waited a strategic moment to heighten their curiosity, then replied, "The elephant's gray."

"Oh, no," they groaned, in mock anguish, meeting each other's eyes, smiling all the while.

"That's *terrible*," Wendy said.

"It's the worst, Dad, truly the worst," added Alex, shaking his head.

"If you're not careful," said Leo, "I'll tell another. More respect, more respect . . ."

"Anything, Dad, anything! Only don't tell another joke!" cried Alex, grinning from ear to ear.

"OK. So I'll try again. Anything new?"

"Not with me," said Wendy. God, she was cute, he thought.

"I found these, Dad," said Alex, pulling out an old pair of sunglasses that Leo recognized instantly. They were his.

"Found them?" he asked. "Found them where?" Leo could never understand their world—its laws, restrictions, possibilities, lim-

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itations. And none of his constructs were capable of explaining it fully. There were gaps that were unexplorable.

"Just found them," explained Alex, as though that was all there was to it. Probably, for him, that *was* all there was to it. Concepts of Time and Space must be almost meaningless, thought Leo. This is just another of those bizarre quirks that SUSIE evolves that dazzle me. Good old SUSIE. The sunglasses, somehow, are part of the extrapolated, quantified, qualified Alex, since they are a part of me. Maybe they're like a dormant gene, and SUSIE Q^2 thinks the chance that they could emerge in Alex is quite high.

Intrigued, Leo said, "Let me see them."

Alex held them up, then put them on. The aluminum-framed shadows stared back at him.

Christ, thought Leo. Haunting. He *is* me. Somehow.

Wendy was feeling left out. "I'm taking electro-flute lessons," she said. "I can play *Melody for Twilight* really good. Well . . . *fairly* good." She twisted her mouth wryly and glanced at him sidewise from between squinted lids, awaiting his approval.

"*Melody for Twilight*!" exclaimed Leo. "That's terrific! That's a tough, tricky piece. That's great. I'm really proud of you, Wendy."

She beamed.

"You kids are super."

They both beamed at his praise.

"But there's something I've got to talk with you about, gang. Something I guess you should know."

They waited, silent, detecting the change to a more serious level of discourse. Kids, he thought. They can pick up every vibration, every nuance of the adults around them. I feel like the caricature of the divorcing father, trying to explain to his kids how he still loves them but he can't live with mommy anymore.

He sensed that they knew it was something like that. Alex was still wearing the large, aluminum-framed sunglasses, his eyes mysteriously shrouded. Beneath the smoked lenses, his mouth tensed grimly. Wendy's eyes widened.

"I have to go away," said Leo, "for a long time," he added, completing the cliché. "I don't know when I'll be seeing you again."

They didn't answer him. They know, he thought. No. That's impossible. How could they know?

They knew.

"Where are you going?" Wendy asked.

Leo had prepared an answer about early retirement, but he realized that it did not account for him not owning a SUSIE Q^2

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in the comfort of retirement. So he had had to fabricate a future that entailed financial hardship, one that precluded his being able to afford such an expensive toy. Even as he was about to begin his prepared explanation, he stopped short. It just wouldn't do. He couldn't make himself say it all.

They knew. He was sure of it. He could feel it.

Without fully making the conscious decision to do so, he began to tell them the truth. It flowed from the moment.

"Well, gang," he began, "I've just decided that I can't go on any longer."

They gazed at him.

"When you get to my age," he said, before realizing that he was suggesting something that had no meaning for them, "you see things differently," he said, forging onward. "The reasons for carrying on when you were younger have evaporated somewhere along the line. I think it's important that I finish up life with the dignity of selecting my own time and method of termination. I don't want to just go on and on, and die with a drink in my hand in a run-down suburban condo-unit somewhere. Shovelled out the next morning by the caretaker . . ." He trailed away. This stuff wasn't for kids.

"Don't we mean anything to you, Dad?" asked Alex.

"You kids are the thing I'll miss most."

"What'll happen to us?" asked Wendy.

Leo sat silently. He tried to see the individual color dots that formed the whole of each visual that confronted him. But he could not. He could see the totality, which was vastly more than the sum of its parts.

"You'll be okay," he said.

"Okay how? Who'll we talk to? Who'll call us?" continued Wendy. "Who'll tell us rotten jokes?"

"Are you going to *kill* yourself?" asked Alex bluntly.

"Yes."

"How? Why?"

"I told you why . . . Sort of. Ennui. Boredom. Failure. Onset of decreasing physical and mental capacities . . . Dostoyevsky had one of his characters say that it was bad manners to live past forty. Did you kids know that?"

Wendy looked at him from far away. "John Lennon said that life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans. Did you know *that*?" asked Wendy.

SUSIE had done it again, thought Leo. How could Wendy know what John Lennon had said? It rang a bell from his own youth,

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he knew. Somehow it had filtered down through the years and the electrons and the memory circuits to be a part of Wendy's experience. I don't understand it, he thought. I can never understand this.

"Don't do it, Dad," said Alex. "We need you. Kids need a father. We can't live alone."

I can't tell them what I told Frank or Phyllis, thought Leo. I can't tell them they're not real. They're only kids. It's not fair to them. Frank and Phyllis are adults. They could understand.

Leo was confused. I didn't count on this, he thought. I don't know what I did count on, but it wasn't this. John Lennon . . .

"Where did John Lennon say that, Wendy?"

"It's in his song *Beautiful Boy*—the one he wrote for his son Sean. He wanted to live to see Sean grow. He couldn't wait, according to the song. But he never did see him grow. That guy shot him down shortly afterward." She paused. "He'd never have done what you want to do, Dad. He'd have given anything to trade places with you, to be alive."

Leo settled back slowly in his chair, clenched his mouth, and dropped his eyes to the floor. There's more to this than I knew, he thought. Maybe I need a bit more time. I can't think clearly with them staring at me.

He looked up. "Okay. Listen, gang. I'll call you again. I promise. No decision till next time. I want to clear my head of a couple of things."

"Promise? Call us again?" asked Alex.

"Promise," said Leo.

The two cherub faces tried to smile. They almost succeeded.

Leo opened his wardrobe drawer and lifted them out. He held them as one might hold a sleeping child, turning them gently in his middle-aged fingers. The hairs on the back of his hands were sprinkled gray, and the backs of his wrists were permanently etched with lives.

In his hands he balanced the sunglasses he had seen on Alex. They accompanied him on these trips because they were a part of his life. Purchased on vacation in New York City years ago—when life was sunny and bright, he thought wryly—they reminded him of feeling young, alive, sparkling, of when vacations were startling, of when every package had a surprise under shiny wrapping. And they were useful here while he infratanned.

Looking at his reflection in the mirror—the shaven head he scarcely recognized any longer—he slipped the glasses on . . .

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And saw his own father.

Through eyes that clouded, through electrical storms of time, through a glass darkly . . .

He saw him and Frank and himself in an old wooden dinghy on a lake in Northern Ontario. His father patiently baited hooks for them, while they, mere kids, looked on wide-eyed at the intricate prestidigitations. His father was smiling at their rapture . . .

The ship hurtled on silently.

He saw him sitting, pensively, at the green, arborite kitchen table, his hand wedged in his belt as was his habit, a bottle of beer in front of him. Mom was keeping him company at the opposite end of the table. Occasionally, they spoke a few words . . .

The trajectory was immutable.

He saw him prone in the white hospital bed, wan, after his final stroke, struggling with short breaths. The lips were dry, the eyes watery. Leo saw himself place his hand on his father's wrist, noting that the hairs on the back of his father's hand were sprinkled gray, the lines there etched deep. "I'd do it again," his father had said . . .

The stars remained frozen, fixed points, piercing white.

Leo's breath caught in his throat. He slumped into the nearest chair, withered. Slowly he removed the glasses and held them limply in his hands.

1100 hours, September 6, 2045.

Leo ran his hand over the stubble that covered his head. He had stopped shaving his skull three days ago, after his discussion with Alex and Wendy. Examining its knobby surface, he had decided, had taught him nothing. This morning he had dumped his bottle of synthascotch down the toilet.

I'll just quit, thought Leo. I'll get another job. I'll be OK. And I'll buy another SUSIE Q^2 for myself.

There are things to do. I even feel a bit excited. It'll be an adventure.

Leo caught sight of the Wintario ticket in the corner of the console, rumpled but ominous. I forgot, he thought.

Reaching for it, he flattened it, half-smiling.

The draw had been September 3—three days ago. He punched the request for winning ticket numbers into the Macrovac and waited. The screen lit up in an array of white numerical sequences against a blue backdrop. For a minute or so he scanned, frowning. Then a slow smile spread across his face.

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He glanced again at his ticket and back at the screen. Well, he thought. Then he chuckled. I've won 5 free tickets on the next draw two weeks from now. He chuckled some more.

That's something. That's something. For the first time: *something.*

Leo knew what he had to do next. He had to contact the N.A. Dept. of Records for Lionel Schoolfair's identi-construct.

Frank would be pleased. ●

IAsfm Puzzle #13

(From page 33)

Solution to Marine Motif

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THE ORCHARD

by Steve Rasnic Tem

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The author has placed stories in such publications as *Twilight Zone* magazine, *Shadows* (Doubleday), *Chrysalis, Destinies,* and others. He is also the editor of *The Umbral Anthology of Science Fiction Poetry.*

art: Odbert

Something is wrong in the orchard.

Everything moves so quickly. Too quickly. The lunch hour over, Yancyville Park is an orchard once again, the clerks rushing from their spots beneath the trees, the technicians getting up from their sunny naps in the grass to return to work in the communications terrace, the gardeners trotting out to their orchard jobs, all knowing that the big day approaches, all trying to get ready, catch up, evolve. Trying to be ready and completely willing when the colony moves out, into the distant cold stars.

I, too, am trying to be ready, trying to be willing. It is difficult for me to adapt to such speeds.

But now something is terribly wrong in the orchard. Something doesn't fit. I can feel it. I've spent a great deal of time in this place; I've always felt relaxed here—the only place in this colony where I've ever felt at peace. Yet now, for some reason, I'm overcome with dread each time I enter the orchard. I grow anxious; my palms sweat. If I wasn't so committed to performing my job, to doing my share in this endeavor, I know I would drop my tools and run, never to return to the orchard. I am afraid I may be about to lose my sanctuary.

Perhaps some intruder, some alien presence? Perhaps a straggler, someone late for his shift? Wasn't that a rustling in one of the peach trees? A sudden movement, there? No, just a bicycle. I scan the distant horizon where it curves upward in the colony. It wouldn't have been the distant movement there I felt, or on the residential terraces climbing part way up the right wall. I gaze out at the small apartment areas down center, ringed by crop-gardens and statuary. No movement there.

I'm usually one of the first to arrive after my other job, but I've been having some problems with one of the new satellite components. I'd work the orchard fulltime if I could—at least I felt that way until recently—but the labor shortages have always left that a dream; the bureaucratic difficulties with Earth slowed the

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influx of new colonists to a trickle this past year, and soon new colonists will be impossible anyway.

There . . . there! Along Wilson's Wall, a small creature climbing down . . . what is it?

It's only one of Hatchett's mutated squirrels. He keeps a few down in this part of Yancyville, more I'm told in the other communities. He's been trying to adapt a few to zero gravity out near the hub; I'm told their acrobatics are truly impressive . . . should make it out there sometime. He's been saying these squirrels, and the birds and lizards he's brought along, are already showing some adaptation in the offspring.

But still . . . something's wrong here. I know. I always seem to know when things are wrong.

It's getting busy now, and my anxiety lifts a bit. I must get to my work. A bright red . . . blue . . . behind that stand of corn. But they're gliders in the distance after all, circling the central elevator tower shining in its ceramic and aluminum decorations. I look for the near edge of the Yancy window—I always do that when I feel agitated—and beyond that, seeking a strange comfort from one of the larger asteroids hanging out in the darkness and stars. That view always stops me; the asteroid pulls my gaze down to the orchard beneath it, this orphaned vegetation from Earth. I close my eyes and imagine the orchard on a planet's surface, the colony vanished, and this asteroid some moon, or, better, sun, providing an alien illumination and source of life for these plants and animals in their new, adopted world. It is a hopeful image, and it consoles me. I try to hold on to it as long as I can.

It makes me giddy; I wonder if I've been here too long. Or perhaps, not long enough. But the desperate rushing about—I can't be the only one who feels unprepared. I can't be the only one who isn't . . . ready. I do want to go; I'm sure this recent nervousness, this sudden reluctance is only a temporary thing. And the nightmares . . . should pass.

Again, anxiety washes over me like a light, cold rain. This isn't the first time I've felt this in the orchard. I am often anxious. The counselor tells me such feelings are to be expected in this environment. The colony has generated a number of new neuroses, the best known being the Solipsism Syndrome—new colonists sometimes evidence a great deal of tension because it seems everything is under their control up here, too much under their control. That was one reason I've gotten jobs like the orchard work in the first place—my counselor put in a special recommendation. The plants grow; you can't always predict how. It is comforting.

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Yet something is still wrong here. Something doesn't fit. Not exactly a presence, I think now. But something is terribly wrong.

I find I want to attend to my plants immediately, feed and trim them, care for them, prepare them for the long journey. I've said often that the plants up here are changing; Hatchett understands, but not everyone believes me. It's always been that way: people who speak the uncomfortable truth are never believed. We must watch the changes carefully; perhaps not all of them will be desirable. I grow afraid sometimes when I think of all the possible changes. In plants, in people. It seems to me I have been saying the same warnings over and over again.

But that the plants and animals can change gives me some faith that people can live in the colonies. People, too, can change for the better. Perhaps I myself can outgrow my fears and reluctance.

Everything changes here; I wonder how different we'll be by arrival time. The animals and humans here detached from their ancestry, and these plants, likewise detached from their Mother Earth. What work has to be done, before any of us can feel at home again?

The miniature trees are my own responsibility. I ponder their slight changes closely; I couldn't tell as much from a larger tree. Repotting, shaping, arranging the diverse species in order to achieve harmony, avoiding competition, antagonism. I've learned my lessons from the Japanese flower arrangers.

But something is wrong here; something in the orchard does not fit. I sometimes feel I can almost grasp it; I sense that it is something I know, yet do not know. It eludes me. I continue to work on a dwarf cypress, trying to ignore the strangeness I feel. I'm suddenly angered by my own paranoia. My part of the orchard provides the only privacy I've had, the only peace I've needed. And when the area is scheduled as the orchard no one may trespass against my solitude. There's so much to do here and even though I know this process cannot be rushed the general excitement has had me quickening the pace with trembling hands.

And now, to feel this . . . strangeness about. It's *intolerable.*

I've been twisting the trunk of the cypress with a brace and wires to imitate the wind-swept look. Now today I carefully wire one branch out and down to imitate a natural droop—all to duplicate in miniature the old tree in a photograph I have hanging on my bedroom wall. It stood on my family's farm for generations before the pollution finally killed it. At one time I believed I might never have a home like the home of my childhood. But in the

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colonies, anything might be possible. I could recreate my family's farm somewhere beyond the solar system; I could have my old homeplace back.

If only I'm brave enough, if my imagination is strong enough.

Weather changes here are slight and dull, but sufficient to be of some interest to my plants. The artificial changes in illumination can be deceiving; I can see shadows that weren't there moments before. But still, something seems amiss; something is wrong in the orchard.

I'm suddenly afraid for my position here, as if this presence might *change* things. Perhaps they wouldn't let me go with them? I've tried other things during my stay; most of us have. Perhaps we're all misfits, we who garden. At first I worked in the children's nurseries, then I moved to the stock-breeding chambers. Just five years ago I supervised one of the fish ponds in the agricultural section. It's the unexpected, unplanned-for quality of these activities I find necessary. "A controllable range of unpredictability," my counselor says. You don't know how a life will turn out; there will always be surprises.

Something *must* grow.

I worry sometimes about saboteurs, rival factions. Is that what's bothering me now? One issue facing the Agronomy Association is whether our limited land space justifies the expenditure of time and energy on so-called purely decorative plantings. For that reason, many of our gardeners use crop or fruit trees in their art. Carter and Gould take care of the dwarf apple and peach. Ballard plants corn stalks in house planters, tomatoes in window boxes, and a mixture of parsley, broccoli, and chard into irregular nooks and crannies. Each weekend you see colonists combing the landscape, peering into the unlikeliest corners for Ballard's semi-hidden little treasures. The regular crop-supplies out of the agrozones are higher quality, but Ballard's are highly prized because of their novelty.

Wilson uses his wall for espalier gardening and if it were up to him the orchard would be a labyrinth of walls and trellises suitable for his two-dimensional effects. His fruit trees grow flat against the wall (allowing even ripening), and are trained into such shapes as palms, T's, U's, candelabra. Currently he's doing T's and U's, the wall greenly inscribed TUTUTUT.

There are some in the colony who would cut funding completely to all but foodstuffs. Could they be the source of my agitation? But I can see all the other gardeners, the crop-growers: Ballard,

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Carter, Gould, Wilson. They seem innocent enough. What's got into me?

The people rush about; it must almost be time for the evening shifts. So soon—I'd been paying so little attention. It's hard to leave. Soon the orchard will become a park again for the evening strollers, the lovers out becoming acquainted, whispering one to another. At least there's consolation there, to give up my beautiful orchard for that.

There . . . there it is again, an uneasiness, an uneasiness rippling through the park with the slight artificial breeze. A young couple is walking ahead of me, by some bushes. Is the problem there? They look around nervously, with vague expressions of uneasiness. Perhaps a terrorist, planning to rip our delicate bubble of air?

That seems ridiculous, yet why do I feel such unease?

In just a few weeks they'll be turning the rockets on. The colony will be moving, always moving, out into the black with stars. But so many of the lovers stroll unconcernedly, as if they don't know what is ahead of them.

The two lovers look around again. Nervous. Agitated. Somehow I know the trouble has something to do with those two young people. Something is wrong in the orchard. Something doesn't fit, and I think I am coming closer to finding it.

I cross the open grass, quickly. I step carefully, silently behind the lovers. The agitant, the wrongness here, feels just out of grasp.

The lovers are so unaware of the changes which have *already* occurred to them, the changes in mental perspective and perception which will one day translate into actual, physical changes. They are young; they don't know. They are a very different breed from myself.

As one who changes so awkwardly, so painfully—I should know.

Our bodies are living memories of all the changes. The colony is fast becoming one more link in a chain leading the colonists into their final selves. It sculpts them slowly, more slowly even than my plants are sculpted, but this adventure transforms them just the same.

So fast, so rapid the movement—I'm afraid if I blink I'll miss it. The wrongness, the strangeness will elude me; I'll be standing here alone with empty arms.

Something is terribly wrong in the orchard. Something does not fit. And when the lovers turn suddenly, I almost collapse in fright, their eyes wild, their faces angry. *What are you doing!* he shouts, and I am speechless to answer, though it is only my sudden

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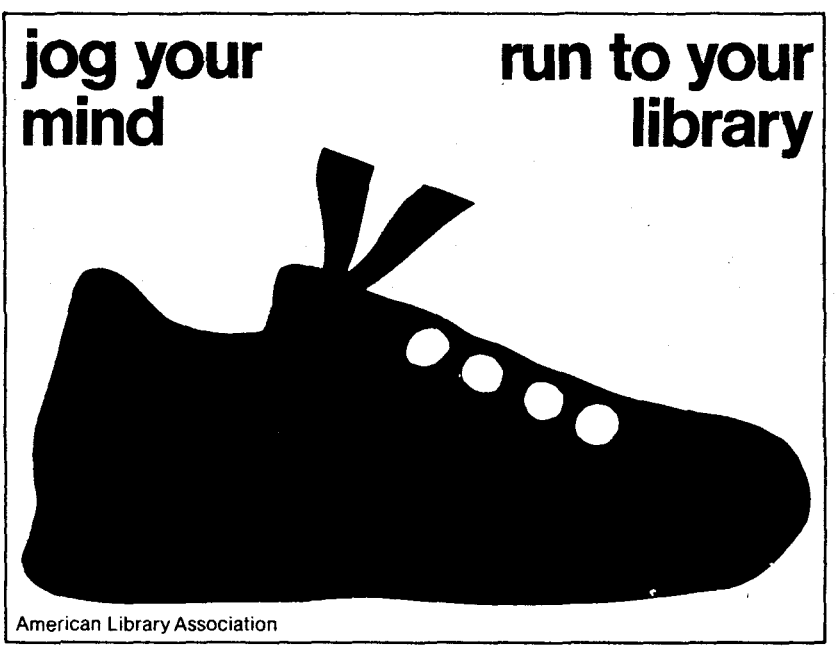
presence which bothers them; I have been doing nothing wrong.

They leave me alone—for I am the intruder, the strangeness, the wrongness here—to cry to myself under the trees in the orchard. They are the adapted plantings, the ones who will survive this dark and lengthy voyage. I do not belong; I do not fit. It is so hard for me to change, hard to make friends, hard to leave what I have known.

The lovers stroll, the park lights dazzle like stars within the small trees, so brilliant they hurt my eyes when I look up out of Yancyville window and see, what is it, this orchard seeming to rise into the dark, dragging me, the wrongness, along. ●



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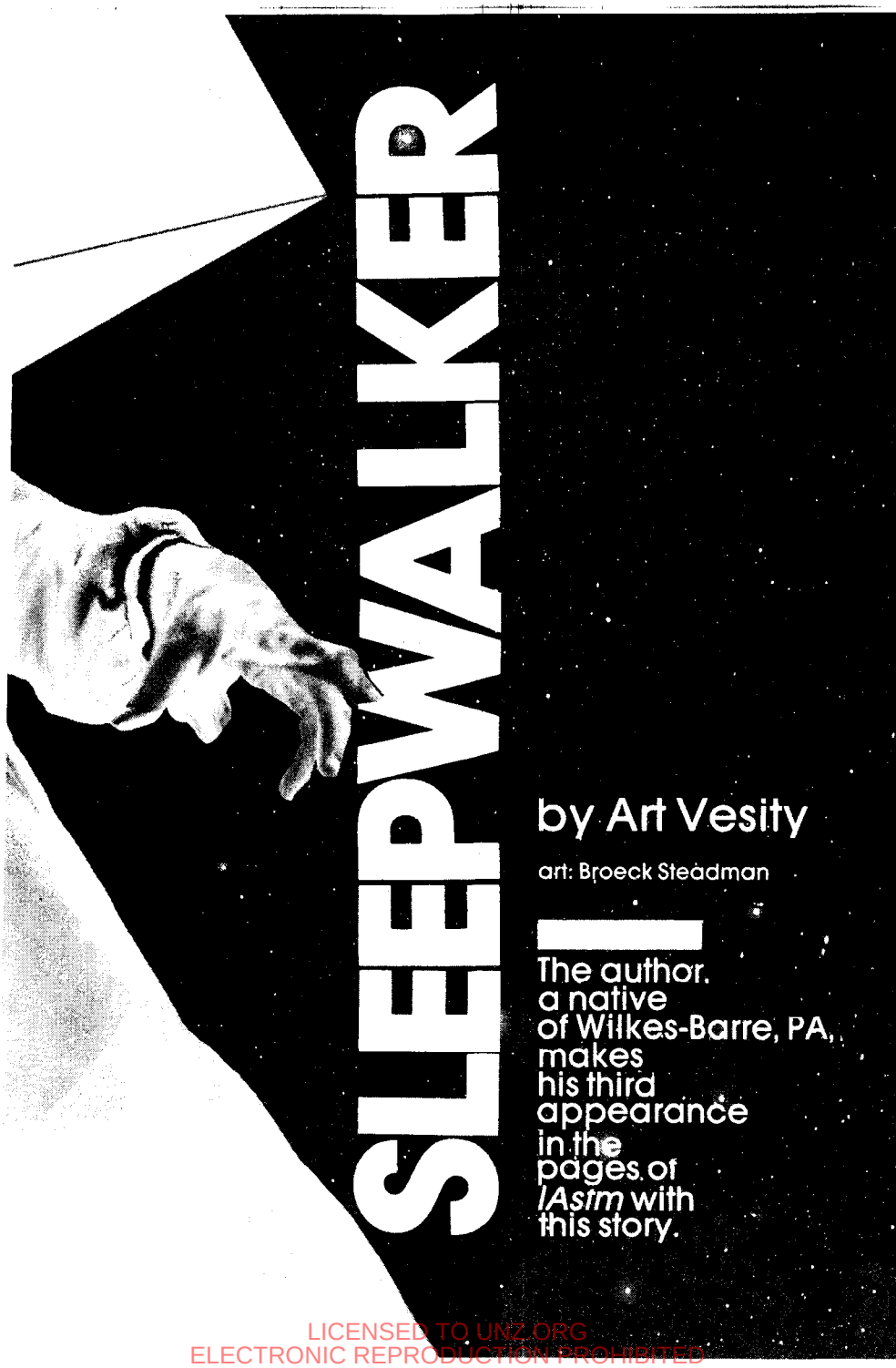
SLEEPWALKER
by Art Vesity
art: Broeck Steadman
The author, a native of Wilkes-Barre, PA, makes his third appearance in the pages of *IAstm* with this story.

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Troy Stallings felt more than saw the highway unwinding beneath the car and was reminded of the uncoiling ribbon of his life. Luckily, the analogy ended there; this highway had no sudden breaks beyond which a driver could see nothing. If only my life could roll on so smoothly, he thought, from a marked beginning to a single, far-off conclusion . . .

As his headlights forged ahead on the unrelenting pavement, he began to think of his former "life." Or dream. Or hallucination. In that life he had had the same wife, Carol, and as in this life, they were rapidly growing bored with each other. They had different children *there*, though; two instead of three, and both boys. And they had lived in San Francisco rather than La Jolla, and he had taught high school instead of college. . . . But he had been essentially the same Troy Stallings in that life: same age, same body (though with a few different scars), same personality (but with some different scars on that as well), born of the same parents in the same large Arizona city. It was as if every few weeks (sometimes *days*) he was jumping in his sleep from one course his life and the world *might* have taken to another. The nighttime leap from that last life to this one had been his fourth. At least that's as far back as he could remember, and he had a remarkable memory.

As he crested a steep hill, the last hill before the turn-off that would lead to his indebting ranch-style home, to Carol (she was a bland woman, no doubt, but *so* sincere) and their three lovely little girls, he was suddenly blinded by the bright lights of something coming at him very large and very fast. A truck in the wrong lane, he thought. Those drivers do tend to push themselves too hard, don't they, and sometimes fall asleep at the wheel? He was swept by a feeling of calm resignation, a feeling that the painful choice (*choice?*) had been made *for* him this time.

Now the truck's headlights were painfully bright, the foremost parts of the truck's cab and his Grand Prix almost kissing, and he realized that he had not even begun to futilely apply his brakes or swerve the wheel.

He might have laughed, but there was no time.

Dr. Radner had a habit of looking out the window while Troy was talking, but Troy didn't really mind, because even when doing so Radner gave the impression of listening intently. He appeared to be in his mid-thirties, like Troy, and had curly black hair (receding hairline) and a prominent nose. He looked very much like the psychiatrist from the movie *Ordinary People*, and Troy

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had almost remarked about that before remembering that there was no such movie, and for all he knew no such novel, in *this* life. It was hard to keep things straight sometimes, despite his memory.

Radner turned from the window and dropped his jogging-shoed feet from the edge of the typewriter stand. "So you woke up from that dream, just as the truck hit you head-on, and found yourself in a new life. Again. Is that right?"

Troy nodded. "That's it. Like the other times, I found myself in a strange bed with a strange woman in a strange room, with sunlight just beginning to come through the curtains. Only this time I had come by way of a violent death, rather than—well, I don't know exactly. In the past, I'd just go to sleep in one place and wake up in the other."

"It's happened five times now, you say?"

"Yes—six lives and five jumps is all I can remember. And I have a very good memory—total recall, in fact. Never had to study in school, just read the material once. I could sit down and write an autobiography for each life, keeping each set of memories from overlapping, if I had the time or the inclination."

"I know how eidetic memory works, Troy," said Radner, rotating his right index-finger in a let's-get-on-with-it motion.

"Yes, of course." Troy decided not to mention that he sometimes had the vague feeling that his photographic memory was somehow tied in with his strange existence—the feeling seemed just too vague to bring up. And he had already tossed an embarrassing number of vagueries at Radner, who seemed, nonetheless, fascinated. "Well—like those other times, I found everything coming back to me in a few moments. Who I am, what my life is like *this* time, who my wife is—there's been three different ones so far—how we get along, where I have to go to work in a few hours, what the new details of my past are, what my goals for the future are . . . everything. You know, I sometimes wonder if morning will ever *really* come for me, or if this is my private hell—going from dream to dream, on and on. Not even getting creamed head-on by a truck can end it, apparently." He found himself staring blankly at Radner's full-to-overflowing ashtray and looked up into the cool, blue eyes. "I don't think I'm going to be able to take many more transformations, Doctor."

Radner turned back to the window with a dissatisfied look, as if he found the acquiescent nature of the "private hell" explanation distasteful. "But what you really believe is that you are

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either insane or actually living through a series of alternate realities, each with its own past, present, and future."

"Can you think of any other rational possibilities?"

"And yet earlier you said something to the effect that in each life, you're plagued by a feeling that there is something missing—'A hollow place in my world,' I think you said."

Troy shifted in the comfortable leather chair. "Yes, and the feeling stays with me, seeming to get worse and worse."

"Until it comes to a head, and you move on in your sleep." He turned *back* from the window again, turning his palms up in a casual toss-it-here gesture. "So what's missing from your life, Troy?"

Troy smiled. I like this guy, he thought. A little obvious at times, maybe, but he dives right in, doesn't just sit there tossing your own words back at you. Doesn't insist that you call him "Carl" when it's obvious you feel more comfortable calling him "Doctor."

"Is something funny, Troy?"

"No. I'm sorry, Doc. Really. It's just that I know what you're thinking—that I'm imagining all these lives or dreams or whatever as an expression of my unhappiness with the course my life has really taken. I guess that's what I wanted to hear you say when I came here. I guess that's what I'd like to believe. But it's just no good. I *know* they really happened—somehow, somewhere. Real lives, Doctor. Real worlds."

Radner lit a cigarette. "Okay. You go on believing that—maybe it's true. But the fact remains that you feel something missing each time, and I think it's obvious that finding out what that *is* is the basic problem here. Don't you agree?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"But what?"

"But it's not the *same* this time. This time I feel as though it's here, right in front of me, *but I can't see it.* That's why I came to you. I never felt the need to get help in any of the other lives, because I think that deep down I was eager to leave them. But now I want to stay, because whatever it is is here, and because I'm tired of leaving loved ones and friends—"

"Although some of them have turned up in more than one life, right?"

"Oh, sure. But not *all* of them. I woke up one time to find that my mother was dead, and that one close friend of mine had apparently never been born. I'm tired of it, Doc. Very tired. And when I think that next time I might lose Jenny—"

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"You haven't talked much about Jenny, Troy, except to say that she's a totally new element. How does your relationship with her compare with past ones?"

The bastard, Troy thought. Wouldn't let me slip past Jenny, would he? "Well . . . my relationship with her is the best. By far." Could *she* be the missing element? he wondered. If so, why did he have the feeling of not being able to see it, as if it were a shadow in the fog, always maintaining its distance? He could certainly see Jenny, had certainly been aware from the morning after the accident that this life held a very special love relationship for him. No, it wasn't Jenny. Something tied in with her, maybe . . .

As he prepared to articulate this to Radner, a Big Ben alarm clock on the desk signalled that his time was up. "Same time next week, Troy?" Radner asked as he escorted him to the door.

"Yes, definitely. I really think I'm getting somewhere, Doc."

But whether it was to a continuation of this life or the start of still another, he didn't know.

He watched her across the kitchen table, munching a mouthful of Rice Chex, and it occurred to him that she looked very much like the others. In each of his lives, he'd been a sucker for large, brown eyes that seemed to look at the world with a constant child-like amusement; for short, round-bottomed frames with unobtrusive breasts. He reached back into the current memory-set and saw them meeting at the college's get-acquainted party for new faculty members two years before; recalled the love-at-first-sight feeling they'd seemed to share; recalled her sexual shyness that bordered on frigidity (caused by, he later discovered, a traumatic encounter with a pedophile neighbor when she was thirteen), and the way it had suddenly and gloriously evaporated in her apartment on the night of their tenth date. He thought of the exhilarating joy he had found in slowly uncovering the extra bits of wit and sensitivity that set her apart from all the others, in all worlds past and present.

"Troy, what's wrong?"

He was suddenly aware of her hand on his. He dropped the half-eaten piece of toast and pulled himself back to the present moment of his present world. "Huh? Oh, nothing. Just not awake yet, I guess."

She looked very unconvinced. "Please talk to me about it, Troy. You've been in a fog for the past two weeks, as if—I don't know." Her pleading look tore deep into him, as it always had when she

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used it as a battering-ram against his brick-wall obstinacy. *Always had.* The irony of that fleeting thought brought him to within inches of laughter or tears—he wasn't sure which. He was only certain that the ironies of his life-switching had never affected him so deeply before.

"Troy! For God's sake!"

He snapped back a second time, really embarrassed now. "Jesus, Hon, I'm sorry. I—I had a weird dream last night, and I'm just trying to remember it. I guess it won't let go of me until I do." It wasn't completely a lie—he had had the recurring dream again, the one he'd carried with him through all of his lives. In this dream he would find himself walking a long corridor, opening doors and looking inside at various indoor scenes or landscapes, with a single person in each. He might see that person sleeping on a bed or sofa indoors, or on a hammock or beach blanket outdoors, but always sleeping—until last night. This time the dream had taken him further than ever before, and behind the doors at this frontier-end of the corridor the single star of each scene was up and about—even though they walked with eyes closed, and arms outstretched before them.

"Want to tell me about it?" Jenny said, still holding his hand.

"I wish there was something concrete to tell. All I remember is walking down a corridor and opening doors. I think it was a hospital corridor." He realized that he had never so identified it before. "I would just look inside and see people sleeping in strange settings, until at the end some of them were up and moving around like . . . like sleepwalkers." The word sent a tremor through him. "Yes, that's it. *Sleepwalkers.* Sleepwalkers who were searching for something—and I was, too. That's why I was opening the doors. *I* was looking for something, too."

"Not another wife, I hope," she deadpanned in her typical way.

He sensed a good opportunity to get off the subject and decided he'd better seize it. Something told him that he'd already gone too far in telling her the dream, though he didn't see what harm it could do. "I wouldn't mind having two of *you,* now that you mention it."

"So! Still fantasizing about doing it with twins, I see!"

They laughed, and he knew his evasion had worked. But even as he guided the breakfast conversation off in other directions, he was aware of a strange uneasiness mingling with his undigested eggs and toast. *Sleepwalker.* The word kept echoing in his mind as he strained to talk normally about happenings at the college and the new crop of wide-eyed freshmen that populated

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most of their classes. Even as they showered and dressed for work, the word was haunting him, and he couldn't imagine why. He had never, as far as he could remember, been a sleepwalker—not in any of his six (or more?) lives.

And he had a remarkable memory . . .

A memory that had been failing him—mostly at the bidding of his own subconscious mind, he later surmised. He made the discovery after they had parked their Rabbit in the faculty lot, climbed out, and were about to head for their respective eight o'clock classes—his an Ancient History, hers an Art Appreciation.

"If you pass by around noon and notice the car missing, don't panic," Jenny said. "I've got that check-up with Dr. Moran, you know."

His feet suddenly weighed tons, and he felt himself swaying slightly, anchored by them like a clown in trick shoes. Something made him want to ignore her statement, to *run* from it, but the trick shoes held firm. "What?" he heard himself ask.

"Dr. Moran, Troy. He wants one more set of x-rays to make sure the tumor's completely dissolved. Didn't I tell you I'd have to go back one more time?"

He felt his face begin to flush. "Oh, yeah. I—must have lost count of the weeks. Thought that was *next* Tuesday." *Temmadril.* The word emerged shouting from the depths of his current memory-set, like an out-of-air diver who had fought his way up from a long way down. Then surfaced images of Jenny coming home months before with the bad news and a bottle of the wonder-drug pills, and the two of them embracing and crying and saying *Oh God, a decade ago this might have been the end, but now the pills can kill it in twelve weeks . . .*

And he knew the race was over. Two races, actually—the long race through lives and wives and lovers and different United States of Americas and different jobs, chasing one of a subset of possible realities of which this was one, *the* one. And the relatively short two-week race in which he'd run from the knowledge that he'd finally reached his goal, in which he'd run from the key element in a new set of memories that, once acknowledged, meant that he'd have to leave something *else* he'd never found. Victory and defeat. Defeat and victory. One race won, one race lost.

"Troy, are you all right?"

"I'm all right. It's just . . ." Lying time again, old boy. "It's just that every time I think of how things might have been if not for Temmadril . . ."

She dropped her briefcase and threw her arms around him,

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pressing her forehead against his chest. "Don't. We promised to try not to think about that any more. And after this last checkup, we won't have to mention it ever again."

"That's right, Babe. Never again." In the corner of one tear-blurred eye, he saw two students walking through the early-autumn dampness, watching, with barely suppressed smirks, these two affectionate profs hugging it up in the parking lot. "I love you, Jen," he said, not caring if the students could hear. "Always will . . ."

She pulled away, wiping her eyes with a coat-sleeve and smiling. "Hey, is this any way for two faculty members to act in public?"

He managed to return the smile, but didn't think it could be very convincing. "Nope. We've got to set a better example for the kids." Keep it light, old boy, keep the tremor from the voice. "I'll see you at three in the lounge, then."

With that he turned away quickly, trying to forget the way her smile had turned troubled at the last instant—a little shrinking at the corners, a little narrowing of the eyes. She had always had the power to see through him. *Always*. Again, the irony. But he did, somehow, have the memories, didn't he? And that *other* Troy Stallings that the *other* wonder-drug had allowed him to tap into—he would still be here with Jenny when it was all over, wouldn't he?

"Good morning, Dr. Stallings!" said the bright voice of a coed passing on his left.

He mumbled a reply and kept his head down, not wanting her to see his face.

He taught his eight and nine o'clock classes absent-mindedly, then headed straight for the college library, deciding that his afternoon students would just have to accept a day off. In ten minutes he had found the article he wanted on microfiche, in a medical journal dated August, 1973. One reading made him sure that it contained the necessary information, and two more readings made him sure that the article was committed, word for word, to the amazing microfilm of his eidetic memory.

Over. Done. Mission accomplished, time to go home. But where *was* his real home, his *first* home? He felt that some sort of veil had been lifted, and indeed, it began to come back to him: A comfortable apartment near Columbia University, he recalled. He had been an assistant prof in the History Department and had led a pleasant but hollow bachelor's existence. Then the head of

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the Psych Department had come to see him one day and told him that the government was looking for intelligent, unattached people with eidetic memories for a very important, top-secret project. Yes, it was a world very much like this one, he decided . . .

Except that there was no Jenny there. Not in *his* life, anyway.

He turned off the microfiche reader and tried to bury the thought, but it was no good. He realized that it was the prospect of losing Jenny that had made him repress the knowledge of temmadril from his new memory-set ever since his arrival two weeks ago, that had made him ignore every mention of it in his presence and glance over every newspaper and magazine article that had dealt with it or its discoverers, two biochemists named Bernstein and McCall. (He wondered what had made them miss it back home, or if they even *existed* back home.) He had refused to see the object of his search simply because there was more happiness here than in his "real" life and all the other lives combined.

He leaned back and closed his eyes, aware only of the hard plastic of the contoured chair against his body. This world had his same parents and sister down in Phoenix. There was the same president in office, the same progression of economic recessions, high unemployment, rocketing inflation. The same world tensions. It was *all* the same here, essentially, except for Jenny, for temmadril, and for Project Sleepwalk (or, if the project did exist, at least *his* part wasn't necessary). So why *not* stay? Back home, they would keep his sleeping body alive indefinitely, awaiting his return—and though he knew there was probably a piece of post-hypnotic suggestion lurking in his brain that would try to force that return, he felt that his love for Jenny could overcome it. Perhaps he could even convince Radner to help him undo it with a counter-suggestion. So—why *not* stay?

He opened his eyes and found himself staring at his reflection in the dark screen. "Because they're waiting," he said aloud, to the face of his other-self. "Millions of them, waiting. Suffering. Dying. And everyone else, grieving or living in fear. Four and a half billion reasons."

He stood up, nodded solemnly to the handful of students who were staring at him from their silent readers, and left the library. It had to be right away, he knew. He would catch a bus home, take one of Jenny's sleeping pills, lie down, and wait. And then later that afternoon Jenny would come home, alarmed, to wake the other Troy Stallings, the lucky one, and he would relate to her that he wasn't exactly sure why he left early, not feeling well,

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probably, but that he was okay now . . . Or *would* he remember that another Troy Stallings had been in phase with him for two weeks, here to memorize a piece of his world and take it home? No—Captain Danvers had said that the hosts would most likely repress any memory of the sleepwalkers once they were gone, rather than face the fact that their psyches had been so easily and totally violated. He would probably only be aware that he had been behaving strangely, and wonder why he had gone secretly to see an analyst in the first place, and decide to never go back. And these thoughts would trouble him for a while, but would soon be forgotten. Maybe a few strange dreams, too . . . But this Troy Stallings felt that he owed the other no apologies.

Only envy.

When morning finally came, he found that he couldn't move. He panicked momentarily, but then remembered that he had gone to sleep with his body encased in a special exo-suit designed to inject his veins with vital nutrients, as well as to periodically vibrate his muscles and bend his joints to prevent deterioration. As he wondered foggily if the suit had done that part of its job, if he would be able to stand and walk when disconnected, he saw the lunar-landscape face of Captain Danvers loom over his. "Welcome back, Troy," he said, voice rough-edged with anticipation. "Have you got it, son?"

He tried to nod his head, forgetting about the exo-suit. "Yes," he said hoarsely, resenting greatly the need to speak. "How long was I out?"

Danvers moved from his field of vision without answering. Troy heard three numbers dialed on a phone, then Danvers's voice. "Sleepwalk TS-100 is complete, and apparently successful. Yes, Mr. Secretary. Troy Stallings. Yes, we'll get his objective on tape as soon as possible, sir. Thank you, sir . . . I'm sure it will work out, sir. We're three-for-three on returnees so far . . . Yes, I'm sure he'll be *very* pleased on this one, Mr. Secretary." Troy heard him hang up, and the face was looming over him again. It was long, beet-nosed, and almost hideously pock-marked, but it retained a kindly quality thanks to the soft cheekbones and bright, green eyes. "One hundred and fifty-two days," Danvers said, as if Troy's question had just been asked. "How long subjectively?" When Troy made no attempt to reply, he waved a hand casually. "Well, never mind that now, but we'll be interested to see if your objective-time and subjective-time match up. One of the others lost a full day for each timepath shift, while the other two lost

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only a few hours." He reached down and released the hinges on either side of Troy's neck. "Now roll your head from side to side. That's it, slow at first."

Troy's neck muscles felt stiff and hot in a way that reminded him of the slight whiplash he'd suffered as a result of a fender-bender in the third dream-life. While Danvers continued releasing hinges down the length of his body, he looked around the tiny white-walled room. While it had been bustling with activity when he went under, it now contained only him and Danvers, the large bank of machines and monitors that loomed behind the bed, and an easy-chair to his right with a black phone resting on one of its arms and a dog-eared paperback on the other. As little sensory input as possible, he remembered Danvers saying, so as not to interfere with the memories. Troy began to laugh, at first softly, then louder, as Danvers' question began to sink in. A look of slight concern came over the captain's face. "What is it, Troy?"

Troy slowly put the brakes on his laughter, and wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his coveralls (*Jenny wiping with her coatsleeve in the parking lot*). "How long subjectively? That's rich, Captain. Really rich. Remind me to tell you about it sometime. All the details of my little odyssey. Only six different lives, three different wives, several lovers—two illicit affairs. I didn't think I would be capable of that, you know. Three teaching jobs and one digging ditches in a public works program because the U.S. was in a depression—excuse me, *bottom-out*, as President Ford called it. Oh, and one death. You were right when you said that the host's dying would only move me along. I was hit head-on by a tractor trailer, only half a mile from home. But that's what they say, isn't it? That most accidents happen within twenty-five miles of your home? Too bad we didn't think of moving somewhere *else*, right?" He began to laugh again, just a chuckle this time, and watched Danvers lick his lips. "Well, the last time I didn't want to leave. Think I was beginning to crack. I'd reached Objective but blocked out the presence of the wonder-drug altogether. I managed to keep that up for two weeks, until I was literally hit over the head with it." Troy was aware that he was talking very fast, but he felt helpless, as if the words were rushing out of their own accord. "Your hypnotic suggestion broke through with a little help, Captain. *That's* why you told me a hypno-session was needed to supplement the dream-drug, isn't it? You wanted to keep the search on a sub-conscious level, so I couldn't decide to give up and stay put somewhere cozy, and so I couldn't tell anybody what was

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going on. Why take the chance of having people on the other side knowing what we're up to, right?"

Danvers nodded with a reluctant expression, as if confessing to some distasteful deed.

"Well, don't look so glum. It worked. Not that I could have convinced anyone anyway. Maybe Radner, after a while. Sharp guy. And Jenny. I think she would have believed me, too." He noted with alarm that the mention of her name had brought involuntary tears to his eyes. Thinking of her had brought out the same grief he had felt when his mother died in the second life. Yes, it was as if Jenny was dead. Alive now only in memory, and in the countless realms of possibility.

Danvers cleared his throat loudly and leaned forward, fists on the edge of the bed. "Look, Troy, I know how you feel—the others experienced feelings of loss and resentment too. But it will pass soon, believe me."

"The hell it will pass. Did I hear you say that three others were back? Three out of how many, Captain?"

"Look, you know I can't—"

"I know. Classified. Like everything else. Well, I'll take a guess—at least a dozen. Maybe a *hell* of a lot more. Well let me tell you, Captain, some of those poor bastards are never coming back in spite of your hypnotic commands, because they are going to find more than they were sent to find. I found my cancer cure, and they'll find their synthetic fuels, super-weapons, faster-than-light drives . . . I can just imagine the list you've drawn up. But some of them are going to also find love, peace, belonging . . . I believe now that there really are *countless* realities, timepaths, whatever you want to call them that the mind can tap into through dreams, and a lot of those people are going to lay asleep in their little white cages until there's sores on their butts and their muscles have turned to mush, despite the damn contraptions you've got them wrapped in. You're going to have a shitload of zombies and cripples to explain along with your miracle discoveries."

Danvers spoke more deliberately this time. "Troy, I understand your feelings. Honestly. The others said very much the same things upon awakening, felt the same bitterness. We understand very little about the sleepwalk procedure, Troy, except that the things that come back really work, and that the mind, if told what to look for, will eventually find a set of circumstances—a timepath, if you will—where it exists. But all new and daring undertakings bring success at some price, Troy. You knew that when

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you volunteered, and so did the others who, as you said, might not wake up for years . . . if ever."

Troy looked away from Danvers and sighed. He felt as if the mad jockey that had been riding his emotional state for the past several minutes had finally been thrown off. Now his mood wandered aimless, riderless, exhausted. "Yes," he said. "I knew. But I never thought . . ."

"It's a woman, isn't it? That Jenny you mentioned. But you're forgetting that she might be *here*, too. We know we owe you more than money and a pat on the back, and although we can't—*won't*—send you back, we will do everything in our power to help you find her in *this* world. And our powers are considerable."

Troy felt hope trying to spring up through the emotional exhaustion and physical stiffness. Yes, she *could* be here, he thought. There were others who turned up in more than one timepath—no, the hell with Danvers' euphemism—more than one *life*. "San Diego," he said. "We've got to start looking in San Diego. That's where she grew up and went to college."

"Okay. If that timepath wasn't extremely different from ours, we may be able to trace her. But don't forget that if we find her, you'll have to start from scratch—no mention of what went on over there. But even more importantly, you'd better keep in mind that she may be already married here. Or she may bear ugly scars from an accident that took place *here*, but not *there*. The possibilities are endless, son, and it's probably safe to say that you wouldn't like most of them."

"Yes," Troy said. "And one of those possibilities is that at this very moment, she is developing an inoperable brain tumor." He sat up, muscles screaming in protest. "Which way to the tape recorder, Captain?"

Danvers patted his shoulder with military briskness. "We'll bring it to you, along with some pills that are guaranteed to keep you *up* for several hours. You just relax right here."

"No way, Captain. I want to get unhooked from all this and move around in my own body again. Even if it's in a wheelchair. And on the way to the tape recorder, I want to stop in a room with windows and look out at the morning before getting to work. Maybe even stick my head out and take a deep breath."

Danvers chuckled. "Okay, Troy. Judging from your memory scores, I don't think that would interfere with your playback. But just what makes you so certain that it's *morning* out there?"

He let silence be his answer, and knew by the look on Danvers's face that his answer was understood. ●

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THE CATCH

by Craig W. Anderson

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art: Artifact

1.

Rigger Moran clung to his swaying perch high above the deck of the *Crest*, moving with practiced efficiency as he tied off his lines. The wind was rising and sea spray made the sails heavy, the ropes difficult to handle. Holding fast to his tie-off pins, Rigger Moran swung his legs around the slick mast, arms straining to pull in the slack in the aft lines; the wind whipped his loose shirt against his back as he wrapped the sail top securely to the cross-beam.

Rigger Moran loved it up-top, among the masts with the wind and the sails and the mist. He glanced up at the clouds which were beginning to release their rain; it pattered over him and he lifted his face up to it, tasting the cool, clear fresh water.

The mast moved with the rolling deck far below; Moran sang to himself as he checked his knotted ties and went hand over hand to the next mast to examine the condition of the curved sails and the loops of line holding them to the cross-over beams.

And then, just as Rigger Moran reached the second sail top, he saw the Herd breaching the green swells off the port side, far out, past the shoals, in the deep water. Knobby fingers rubbed across

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his wet eyes and he pulled his sea cap down around his ears as he swung in a swooping figure eight with the mast. He couldn't believe his eyes; the Herd was early! Two periods early and here they were, drifting like small islands, white foam breaking over their immense flanks, their wing-like fins spearing the water effortlessly, raising plumes of green-white spray that glittered into a wind mist. The Herd was early.

"Ho deck! Port side! Herding sighted!" He hallooed to the deck far below.

"See them *fly,* my friends." Moran thought to himself, amazed as he always was at their hugeness. Larger than the *Crest*, the members of the Herd gamboled, diving and splashing, great leviathans of life itself.

"Ho deck! They're here! They're here early!" Rigger Moran's voice was whistled away by the rain wind but the Deck Master and his crew on deck were pointing and waving up at him. A blast of white light ran past him, up into the swirling dark clouds; the signal flare was off into the dusk. The township would see it and they would know.

Clutching the creaking timber that waved in the plunge and rise of the *Crest*, Rigger Moran grinned and rattled his hands on the tie-offs in happiness at his good fortune. First to sight the Herd received special consideration from the Catch, and Moran warmed himself with the thought of his family with full bellies, warmer skin-clothes and perhaps, if they were lucky and the Hookman good enough, a new bonehouse. Rigger Moran was a happy sailor as he was tossed like a gale-flung pennant atop his mast as the *Crest* put her helm hard over and made for port. What a celebration there would be; he would see smiles and hear laughter.

The Herd had come early. Surely the gods of the sea were with them now. The Herd, the life-giving Herd had returned; the Deep Ones were here.

2.

The *Crest* edged into her slip, hull knocking quietly against the dock walls. Captain Dell signalled to the hands, and they tossed their lines onto the swaying dock where the handlers curled them around the blocky tie-down pylons.

"All secure, Cap'n," First Mate Sorreno reported. Captain Dell nodded, gave final instructions, and with his gray long-coat flapping in the wind from the sea, strode down the bone gangplank

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to the dock where Councilman Armas waited with a welcoming party.

"We saw your flare, Captain," Armas said through his tangle of beard. "The Herd has come?"

"Yes, Mr. Councilman," Captain Dell replied. "Sighted by Rigger Moran, sir."

"Mark Rigger Moran in the Log, Mr. Secretary. He'll receive first choice of the Catch, of course," Councilman Armas said to a large man to his left who noted the request in a thick, heavy ledger.

Captain Dell smiled. His crew had sighted Herds twice in the last two seasons and, being a proud captain, he would personally lend his congratulations to Rigger Moran.

"Let's get out of this weather, Captain. I have some mead fresh from the barrel to warm us. For certain, you and your crew are welcome to it this night." Councilman Armas turned, and Captain Dell notified his first mate of the invitation. Sorreno saluted and walked smartly to the *Crest* to relay the news to the crew.

The group made their way along the bobbing pier to the muddy road, bordered on each side by low buildings made of bone, skin-cloth, and wood, or what passed for wood. Lights glimmered in the dusk from small windows, and the sweet smell of burning *chaka* issued from the thin chimneys of the houses.

Captain Dell pulled his coat tighter around himself. Rain was falling steadily and the wind was cold from the northeast. He always felt cold on land when the rain sheeted down and the wind blew. But topside on the *Crest*, outside of the shoals, rain skating down, wind whistling around taut lines, his crew moving along the rigging, cursing good-naturedly, the snap of skin-sails loud above the ever present murmur of mother ocean . . . there, Captain Dell was never cold.

He loved the sea and would have spent all of his days aboard the *Crest*, leathery hands at the wheel, face turned to the sea breeze, shaping a course for the best seining grounds. But if the sea ruled his sense of adventure and purpose, his family on shore ruled his heart; after the obligatory hoisting of mugs of thick mead with his crew and the councilmen, Captain Dell would make his way through the confused turnings of the township streets to finally arrive at his warm home, where Elly and Jason waited. Elly understood his need to be with the sea, knew that little Jason would follow his father onto the emerald vastness one day. She loved them both, he knew, and understood that it wasn't a matter of choice or love but of survival and tradition that made the sons

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follow their fathers to the sea. Without the seine/spotter ships such as the *Crest*, they could not survive.

3.

The meetinghouse was aglow with cheer and heat; the large fireplace, huge chaka logs flaming, cast its flickering orange glow over the assembled crews; they roared, laughing, and traded their sea tales uproariously.

After consulting with Captain Dell, Councilman Armas withdrew to an alcove where Mayor Bridgeman waited.

Mayor Bridgeman had been a captain, perhaps the best captain of the townships' seine/spotter boats. His crews had found more Herds of the Deep Ones than any others in their brief recorded history. After a snaking loop of line had deftly removed his right hand during a terrific hurricane, he was elected Mayor. The settlement was better for his lost hand, for Mayor Bridgeman's leadership had made their township the most prosperous of the three.

Councilman Armas settled in across the rough-hewn table, and Mayor Bridgeman pushed a fresh mug into his hand.

"Councilman, exactly how early is the Herd?" Bridgeman asked quietly, puffing on a stone pipe which emerged from his immese beard. Almost all of the men wore beards; if the seas were gentler than the land with their chill and frost, the land was not so forgiving. Their supply of skin-cloth was insufficient to provide masks; thus, beards were the order of this, and every other, day.

"Very early, Mr. Mayor," Armas said, wiping a froth of drink from his moustache with the back of a slender hand. "It is indeed fortunate that a Herd has come up for us, but . . . are we ready?"

Bridgeman's blue eyes were slitted and hard. He expelled a stream of white smoke, left hand clenched on the table. "It will be close, Mr. Armas, very close. If only we didn't need this Catch so badly."

"True, Mr. Mayor. But with our population growing . . . we must expand, Mr. Mayor. We need the children, the growth for the future. And now, this Herd of Deep Ones comes up, almost as if they were called . . ." His voice trailed off and he pulled a draught of mead into his dry throat.

Mayor Bridgeman nodded thoughtfully, gazing out over the assemblage of roistering seamen. "*Called,* Councilman Armas? Strong talk, that." He raised his calloused hand, quieting the protest from Armas. "Be calm, sir. I jest. But only partially. This early Herd leaves us very short of Hookmen, and you know how *they* feel about the Herds."

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Shoulders hunched with tension, Councilman Armas nodded in agreement.

"Yes, Mr. Mayor, we all know how our Hookmen feel. But, like us, without the Catch they'll die; it's us that keeps them alive. We grow them, and without the Tanks . . . none of us seem to have a real choice; we all must work 'round for a Catch. The Herd is here, early, like it or not. The Deep Ones have come up and we know not their reasons, if indeed they have any. We must take advantage of this bounty, Mayor."

"Agreed, Councilman. A sound net you've cast, sir. A toast to this Herd of Deep Ones and to a grand Catch." The mayor pulled his pipe from his mouth and held it and the flagon in his huge left hand, and quaffed the strong brew with one mighty gulp.

"And now, Mr. Armas. To business. We may be in some difficulty."

"The Hookmen?" Armas queried.

"Indeed, sir. Always it is the Hookmen. None but one is out of the Tanks and ready for the Catch. And he's been out for some years now and we know it well, sir."

Armas sucked in his breath and began to tap a heavily wrapped boot toe against the table leg. "*None* ready for Pulling?" Incredulous. "I was assured they would be grown by now. Technician Wayne said . . ."

The mayor nodded assent. "I know, Councilman. But science," he chuckled deep in his chest, "science is not absolutely reliable here, as we both well know. If nothing else is absolute, we cannot expect science to be otherwise. If the Herd were on schedule," another chuckle, "our Hookmen, our *new* Hookmen, would be ready."

A roar arose from the sailors as a particularly ribald conclusion to a sea-faring tale was reached.

"As it is, Councilman Armas, our Hookmen *aren't* grown enough, they cannot be Pulled now, and we're limited to one Hookman. We will do our best with what we have."

Armas nodded. He knew the mayor was correct. "And the only Hookman available is . . . ?"

Mayor Bridgeman settled his bulk more comfortably into his chair. The alcove was an island of relative quiet in the sea of boisterous sailors.

"Our Hookman for this Catch is . . . Thomas. Hookman Thomas, sir, is ours."

Councilman Armas sighed. Of all the Hookmen, it would be old Thomas, the last of the Third Batch.

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Old Thomas. Well, thought Armas, he'll have to succeed.

"We'll greet him with the news at dawn, Mr. Armas. The Herd will not sound for at least three days, and Thomas will have to prepare." The mayor paused, then said quietly, leaning across to Armas: "And, Councilman, it may not be a coincidence that the Herd rose up just now. You may have struck close to the truth. Called? Hmmmm . . . our Hookmen do have the sense, and old Thomas just may have wanted one more Catch. He knows the others cannot be pulled . . . hah! Old Thomas! Perhaps we've not given the crafty old devil his due, Councilman!" Mayor Bridgeman threw back his head and roared his amusement.

Lighting his own pipe, Councilman Armas failed to detect the humor in the situation.

4.

Dawn. Hookman Thomas quivered in his Tank, cold air brushing over his chest and thighs, lukewarm water supported him. He rolled sideways, opened one tired eye to his window, meeting the first light. He lifted a hand and splashed water over his wrinkled face. Groaning, he struggled into a sitting position, his thin shanks resting on the padded floor of the shallow Tank. He stretched his gills open and flexed them closed, feeling the tight muscles of his back loosen.

The gill slits, ranged down his humped back from shoulder to waist and divided by his spine, opened and closed with soft sucking sounds; old Thomas pulled his skin tight and the soft flow of mucus began spreading from the large pores surrounding his gills, lubricating them, protecting their sensitive membranes from the drying air. He closed off his gill trachea, inflated his lungs, purged the water and took in air, gulping softly.

Old Thomas rested in his tank, watching the sun rise through the northern mists. Already he heard, far off in the still morning, the clatter of hooves and the creak of machinery. The Growers were already at their hard work, wresting growth from the acidic, rocky soil. The buzz of blades cutting *chaka* drifted in with the dawn breeze.

Hookman Thomas climbed out of his tank, stretched his soft, wrinkled body, and dressed in hooded skin-cloak, slipped webbed feet into wide slippers, and buckled on his kilt. He fumbled a cold breakfast of *sonas* fish and leaned against a window sill, staring speculatively across the now busy dock, where workers were bustling over the Catch Barge, looking like small, black beetles against its enormity.

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The Herd had come; the Deep Ones had dreamed a dream, *his* dream. Thomas smiled. The dream still circled around his consciousness, pushing at his imagination with gentle touches. If he closed his eyes, he would dream the dream again. But it was a dream no longer. They had come, to find the source of their dream. Hookman Thomas was satisfied, knowing that the others still slept, immature, in their Tanks, not ready to be Pulled for days yet. He would be alone on this Catch; the Deep Ones knew it and they had come to him.

He shook his head, long strands of grey hair fell over his forehead; Hookman Thomas watched the Catch Barge lumber to life, aided by the crew. Chantys could be heard, and the laughter of children; cries of amusement floated like morning mist over the township.

"And they think I do not know when the Herd comes and the Catch is upon us," Thomas thought, a small laugh sliding from his mouth. "Thank you, Deep Ones, for coming. Old Thomas extends his thanks. I know you understand." He smiled and padded to the door with the exaggerated, knee-high walk of the Hookman. His gills sucked and he left a moist trail of thin mucus behind him.

Thomas filled his water bulb, strapped it on his belt beside his food pouch and, gnawing a soft *sonas* pulled from the pouch, he opened the door of his hut to greet Mayor Bridgeman, Catch Barge Master Nigg, and various council members who stood shivering at his doorstep.

They had come to announce the Herd, and he, old Thomas, was ready for the Catch.

5.

Catch Barge Master Nigg strode beside Hookman Thomas, speaking in low tones as they inspected the Barge.

The sun had risen high and the deck gave up its moisture with a white steaming. The Barge crew worked with an eager anticipation, casting sideways glances from beneath their pullover skin-caps as the two passed by in the ankle high mist.

"Here, Hookman, the new lines are ready," Barge Master Nigg pointed out, narrowing his good eye critically as he scanned the man-high coiled loops. Barge Master Nigg possessed only one good eye, but it missed nothing.

"Very good, Barge Master," Old Thomas remarked in his calm, watery voice as he sipped from his water tube.

"And here, sir, we have reinforced the Hook strap, an inno-

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vation of Hook Master Tiss. We've tested it in the deep water beyond the reef, and it has worked perfectly each time. It should be of some additional help, Hookman Thomas." Nigg waited for Thomas's reply.

Thomas nodded his approval and walked to the Hook, ran his webbed fingers over the diamond-slick, retracted blades, and nodded again. Barge Master Nigg motioned to the Hook crew, and they jumped to eagerly and with block and tackle carefully lowered the silver spider of the Hook sphere into its water cradle.

"The tension lines, Barge Master?" Thomas asked.

"Ready, all first-rate, sir," came the answer.

"The release pulleys?"

"Prepared and wound to the tension you prefer, Hookman," Nigg said. "Would you favor my Catch Barge with your Test?"

"An honor, Catch Barge Master Nigg," Thomas replied, completing the necessary ritual.

Nigg shouted: "Barge crew! Hookman Thomas would Test our Hook! Up with the Shield! Smartly now!"

The crew of eight moved quickly to their lines, unwrapped the ties from the shield-lines and, as their crewchief barked commands, pulled the pins of the shield-lines.

Suddenly, a section of the flat bone and *chaka* deck of the Catch Barge shot up around the water cradle of the Hook, shielding it. The Barge rocked gently in the ocean's morning swell.

Thomas lifted a clenched fist to his chest and opened his fingers. Barge Master Nigg nodded and opened a hatch in one of the sections and stood aside as old Thomas slipped through, his trail glittering on the deck behind him.

Within the Shield Thomas felt at ease, totally at peace. His shining Hook bobbed in the dark water; the shield cut off the sun and it was quiet and cool there. He walked slowly around the Hook, practiced eyes roaming from spine to axispoint to hatch to the tie-downs of the eight tension lines.

He glanced up at the eight-sided patch of grey sky above and saw the tip of the enormous crane and the main line disappearing into the geared opening there. The apex of the eight tension lines met the now slack main line in a knotted tangle of huge ropes, each as large as the Hookman's thigh. All was ready; the lines were fast and true.

He leaned down to the Hook and released the entry hatch. It clicked open; he removed his clothing and lowered himself into the knee-high water inside the latticed, open-sided sphere of the Hook.

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Inside the Hook, Hookman Thomas was comfortable; his gills quickly shed much of their mucus to the calm lapping of the sea, and Thomas closed off his nose-mouth trachea and breathed deeply of the ocean.

He settled into the support webbing and rotated it slightly until all of his back was submerged.

With hands that seemed to move of their own volition, Hookman Thomas inspected his Hook, the light from the opening above casting a checkered pattern of shadows over his grey-green flesh.

All was in first-order, as he'd known it would be. Barge Master Nigg was the best Master, his crew attentive to every detail as if their very lives depended on their best efforts; and, of course, they did.

Old Thomas lowered his webbing further until he was fully submerged. His eye membranes automatically flickered down to cover his eyes. The world beneath the surface leaped into clarity. He raised the webbing out of the water, his membranes retracting with a blink, and pulled the single release lever of the Hook.

With a snapping vibration, the curved spikes whipped out, nearly instantaneously it seemed; a hundred glittering scythes slashing through water and air. They had been tensioned for submerged extension; the partially submerged test was more than just tradition. Thomas knew that the difference in density between air and water was great and that when the Hook had to be set to make the Catch, the incredible power and speed of the spikes would insure the setting. The Hook floated in its cradle like some giant sea anemone, a ball of needle-pointed death.

Hookman Thomas retracted the spikes; he was satisfied.

He left the Hook, drank and fed himself, donned his garb, and exited through the Shield.

"Barge Master Nigg, my Hook is ready. You and your crew have done superb work. We may begin the Catch."

6.

Councilman Armas stood with Mayor Bridgeman on the barge dock and observed the huge vessel pull away, oars dipping in unison, slate dark sails snapping in the sea wind. The crane towered above, resting solidly on its house-tall gear platform, rope coiled like intestines within the housing. Clouds drifted and the ocean glittered in the mid-afternoon sunlight.

"A beautiful sight, Mayor Bridgeman," Armas said, smoke from his pipe skittering off toward the sea.

"Indeed it is, Councilman, it surely is," Bridgeman said, strok-

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ing his beard. The wind pressed their jackets hard against muscled backs.

A cluster of sail craft, dwarfed by the Catch Barge, skipped over the surface of the sea, slipping through the waves generated by its passing, running with its great flank just a mastlength from the powering oars.

"Not much of a crowd for the sailing," Armas noted.

"They grow smaller with each Catch," Mayor Bridgeman replied.

"One would think, sir, that so important an event, one which insures their survival, would create some eagerness in the souls of our citizens," Armas said stiffly.

A low laugh greeted his observation; Mayor Bridgeman clapped him on the shoulder. "They're confident, Councilman. Our Catches have always been at least moderately successful. Even a small Deep One gives us much. Bone, skin, flesh, fuel . . . we've been too successful, I think. These adventures have become commonplace, regardless of their importance to all of us."

Councilman Armas sighed and dipped his head in assent. Commonplace. The Catch Barge commonplace; the thought of such an event being of diminishing interest troubled him.

"But somehow, I feel old Hookman Thomas engineered this Catch, Mayor. It's impossible . . . I think. Empathy can only carry a Hookman and his Hook to the Deep Ones. But . . . Nevertheless . . ."

"Ah, be still, Councilman," Mayor Bridgeman said, turning back toward the town perched precariously at the edge of the sea. "What difference if old Thomas had something to do with the early Herding? This will be his last Catch; the other Hookmen will be Pulled soon, and old Thomas will be able to retire with the honors due him. Relish this early Herding, sir, and thank the Deep Ones for their largess in coming to us so early, whatever the reason."

"Mmmmmm . . ." Armas walked with the mayor against the wind into the settlement. The houses creaked in the wind, their walls constructed of ribs, the skin of their walls the skin of the Deep Ones; the sails of the craft, the clothing the townspeople wore, came from the Catch of the Deep Ones. The flesh fed their children, the oils lit their lamps and greased their wheels and protected their skin from the keen summer sun and storms. Almost all that they had came from the Deep Ones caught by the Hookmen and their Hooks. The *chaka* trees and the rocky soil

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gave them little except the barest of necessities. The seine ships brought little enough from the sea.

Yes, thought Armas. We owe our existence to the Deep Ones and especially to the Hookmen.

In some ways, all of the hardened folk of the township envied the Hookmen their simple lives. But what the Hookman had to endure . . . Armas shuddered.

"Mayor, allow me to provide mead for the two of us. I'll not rest easy until the Catch is done."

"Agreed, sir."

Bridgeman looked back over his shoulder at the departing Catch Barge. It appeared smaller, out beyond the reefs, making good time as it went out with the wind and the tide; the oarsmen would be fresh if the Catch required a pursuit. His eyes narrowed. *This* could be a Catch to remember.

7.

"Lookouts aloft!" the first mate bellowed. The four masts with their bone baskets were quickly occupied by scurrying lookout crews. The masts were as tall as the crane and, placed as they were at the extreme port and starboard corners of the Catch Barge, they offered a horizon-to-horizon view.

The plateau-like deck of the Barge was alive with activity: men spliced lines, sharpened long gaffs, shaped new lockpins, coated the catch lines with grease, polished the crane gears, inspected the deck for stress damage, lowered sounding lines, repaired the main cabin, and avoided the Hookman hut near the crane housing. The Hook Shield was down, with the Hook crew adjusting, polishing, testing, honing the Hook.

Riggers shouted to each other as they scampered from mast to mast, reefing sails, patching wind tears with bone needles and skin-sheaths, pinning lines with catch-pins. Haulers inspected their pilings around which haul lines were wrapped; block and tackle were adjudged for cracks while the Haulmaster led his crew in exercise with running and various conditioning drills. When the Deep One was Caught, it would be hauled up onto the deck via the slant board, aft. Sheer muscle and leverage would vie with the immense tonnage of the Deep One; the counter-balances which would offset the weight of the Catch were moved in their slick tracks back and forth, the clash of tackle mingling with the grunting sighs of the Moving crew.

Barge Master Nigg stood near the counterweight slides, watching his crew adjust and lubricate the huge bearings within the

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slide troughs. He often stood there on the port side, leaning against the Catch net housing to oversee the counterweight maintenance. He ran his eye over the slide tracks of the weights and past them to the crane at the mid-point of the Barge's flat deck. Everything on the Catch Barge was huge, too large to take in with one glance.

We're just tiny things on this world, Nigg thought. We've had to exceed our size limitations to Catch the Deep Ones. We work all our lives on the Barges . . . and our children take up the duty. A hard life, aye, but a fair one.

The first mate approached with a steaming mug of soup. Every day here at the weight tracks, he made his afternoon supper with First Mate Colley.

"Thank you, Mate Colley," Barge Master Nigg said, sipping from the mug. "My compliments to the cook; as usual, his brew is excellent."

"I will tell him, sir," Mate Colley answered, watching the choppy waves thrust against the tall sides of the Catch Barge.

"Have we come to the Herding area yet, Mate?"

"The navigator and lookouts have told me that we are close, Barge Master. We've passed spoor signs this past watch."

"Aye. Good. And how is Hookman Thomas?"

"He has not left his hut, Barge Master. He informed me that he feels the Herd is close; a day, two at the most. He would like to see you at sunset." The first mate stared out over the green world of ocean, torn by their wake behind.

"We *are* close, then. Please tell Hookman Thomas that I will be at his call come sunset. Put the crew of Catch watch up at dawn." Nigg hunched his shoulders against the constant misting sea wind, hands clenched around the empty mug.

"Aye, sir."

8.

Mayor Bridgeman and Councilman Armas had left at dawn for the Tanks; a light drizzle wafted down from dark clouds. The sun was a dim red glow behind them, giving no warmth to the morning.

Their boots sucked at the muddy path that wound through the low hills behind the settlement. Armas looked back over his skin-coated shoulder at the clustered houses, smoke rising like black ropes from chimneys, orange lamp glow making an irregular pattern of light against the dark silhouettes.

"A miserable day, is it not, Councilman?" Bridgeman mumbled

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around his pipe. "A shame that the Tank Farm is so removed from the township on days such as this, eh?"

Armas grimaced and drew his coat hood closer about his head. "Mayor, we have no choice. When they brought the Ship down, no choices were available. Having thought on it some, I do not feel they were thinking of the comfort of possible future generations when they arrived."

The mayor laughed aloud at the sarcasm. He knew Armas well; the two of them visited the Tank Farm every three days, more to give Technician Wayne company than to supervise the work there.

They slogged around a hill and the Tanks loomed like silos before them; a metallic sheen, glowing red from the dim sunlight, illuminated the grounds and Technician Wayne's small house.

Mayor Bridgeman squinted into the red-grey gloom and found Technician Wayne behind a window, writing intently in a ledger, bald head aglow from the light of the oil lamps within.

Beyond the house, the corroded mass of the Ship loomed, larger than even a Deep One, but skeletal, rusted maroon and black; it rested in a shallow depression, now a lake, and every year the acid crawl of rust and decay devoured more of its fading hull.

"She'll not be with us much longer, sir," Bridgeman said quietly.

"Indeed, Mayor. Perhaps in our lifetime we will see it fall into itself. It's miraculous that the Ship has lasted these many generations. If only . . ."

"If, if . . . our lives are bound by *ifs*, Councilman Armas. Be thankful the Tanks were salvaged, else we would not be here. They knew enough to save the Tanks first . . . and they are just one more insurance standing between us and death. That's certain, sir." Mayor Bridgeman stood at the door of the technician's house; he boomed a knock on the bone-skin door and a hearty "Enter, my friends!" cut through the creak and flap of the house's walls as they were buffeted by the wind.

Mayor Bridgeman and Armas gratefully left the chill morning behind them for the warm interior of Technician Wayne's home. In the alcove they removed their muddy outer boots and rain-wet skin-coats, then pushed through a carved *chaka* door into the purring, humming world of Technician Wayne.

"Hello Mayor, Councilman. Good of you to come on this terrible day. Hull, please provide something warm for our gentlemen visitors."

For such a small wizened man, Technician Wayne was robust of voice and ruddy of complexion. He carried his record book and

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marker under his arm and looked comfortable in his soft skin-robe.

"Hull! How are you, boy?" Mayor Bridgeman called out, clapping the tall blonde youth on the shoulder as he accepted a hot mug of brew.

"Fine, Mayor, Councilman," the boy said, grinning. He would replace his father at the Tanks and now, in his adolescence, he spent the days with his father, learning the intricacies of the Tanks, the growing of the Hookmen, their Pulling and Orientation. As the son of Wayne, Hull was expected to take over for his father as the prime technician gradually, as his knowledge increased.

The Tanks were an automated operation; their predecessors from the Ship had sealed the computers and reactor and all vital equipment forever inside a block of impenetrable material, the name and composition of which had been lost over the decades. Nothing their ancestors had brought on the Ship had survived other than the Tanks; records, clothing, tapes, technology beyond that which was known from being passed along the generations, food, animals, all had fallen to the harsh climate of the world. Only the modified life forms had survived and, as much as was possible, flourished.

The survivors of the landing of the Ship had realized what would befall those who lived on and with the Tanks, they were able to alter enough of their number genetically to insure their survival. Then, with a stroke of genius, they created the Hookmen; and then, their work completed, they died.

"We carry on a dream," Mayor Bridgeman said.

"A nightmare," Armas muttered.

"Now, Councilman. Belay your grim thoughts. Our people live, a Catch is forthcoming, food will soon be upon our tables in abundance, and our new Hookmen will be Pulled soon. We have much to be thankful for, sir."

Thankful for the Catch Barge and the understanding of it, the slim technology required to maintain and use it, Armas thought.

The two men settled themselves into comfortable bone-chairs and watched Technician Wayne and Hull go about their arcane business. Neither Bridgeman nor Armas understood the fine points of the Tank Farm nor how the Hookmen were grown or Pulled. They fully understood their roles and left the technical matters to Wayne and Hull.

Armas said, "I ofttimes wish, Mayor, that those who captained the Ship had left more of themselves behind."

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"Ah, sir. But they did!" The mayor thumped his chest. "Us! We may not know much of the men and women who put us here, but they provided us with courage and spirit and instinct enough to survive. Should we ask *more* of them, hummm?"

"Ah . . . no. We do what we can, Mayor . . . what we can." Armas let the subject die.

Technician Wayne stood before a maze of flickering globes of various colors, humming to himself, touching one, then another, nodding, directing Hull in associated, equally mysterious activities. As with all other functions of the settlement, Wayne had been born to his task, and he pursued it with dedicated vigor.

"Gentlemen. Our new Hookmen will be ready for Pulling tomorrow. We've only lost three this Batch. Old Thomas shall have companionship soon, I'll wager. He'll be able to trade sea tales, or whatever it is that Hookmen do, when he returns from the Catch." Wayne joined Bridgeman and Armas. "Hull, that's enough for today. Be ready at first light, son, for we will be Pulling the Hookmen early."

Hull nodded, made his farewells, and departed.

The three friends sat amid the warmth, listening to the wind and the rain rattle the walls.

New Hookmen! Mayor Bridgeman thought. The township will be secure once again. Having only one Hookman available is most troublesome. Ah, with a new Batch the Deep Ones will return and the Catches will continue.

Secure in this knowledge, Bridgeman joined in conversation about the sea and the Catch with Armas and Wayne.

They all felt the excitement building for the Catch; they knew it was about to begin, out there in the deep, emerald green sea.

9.

Dawn came quickly to the Catch Barge. The crew had been ready long before sunrise, and now, with the sun at their backs, the crewmen who were not on immediate duty stood watching the water at the shadowed portside of the Barge. The sea surged darkly at the side of the vessel. Small wavelets slapped and frothed against the mountainous hull.

Barge Master Nigg strode from his cabin, coat flapping, breath streaming ahead in the chill. He stepped to the rail, adjusted his eye patch, and grumbled low in his throat. First Mate Colley edged into the group at the rail and raised a gloved hand in the traditional pre-Catch ritual.

"Barge Master Nigg. Good morning, sir."

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A stacatto near-curse met his greeting. Nigg was in his usual pre-Catch mood, a tension twisting in him that would not depart until the Deep Ones were sighted.

First Mate Colley said: "Deep One spoor to port. Unmistakable, recent. We're close."

"How long have we been adrift, First Mate?"

"We shipped oars just before first light, Barge Master."

Nigg nodded. "The Oarsmen?"

"They're quite well, sir. The first shift has eaten and rested; the second crew is now at oar."

"Excellent. And Hookman Thomas?" Nigg's single eye glittered at Mate Colley. The sun was just cresting the horizon, and the moist deck steamed beneath their booted feet.

"I notified him myself, Barge Master. He answered with three knocks, sir."

Nigg started slightly. "Three knocks? That close, Mate Colley? Three?"

"Yessir." Calmly.

"Make ready the Catch Barge, First Mate. Prepare the crane." Nigg said, issuing the first Catch order.

"Aye, sir!"

The First Mate strode quickly to the crane ladder, clambered up, and stood solidly on the first level platform, hands cupped to his mouth.

"Crew! Aloft, secondshift lookouts!"

"Aye, sir!"

"Belay those balance lines! Clear your base lines! Crane crew to posts! Take away your true lines! Riggers ease off your halyards! Clear away your mizzen vanes! Oarsmen to the ready! The Catch is begun!"

10.

Hookman Thomas heard the rumble of lines as the crane rotated to aft, felt the thud of running footsteps as the crew scattered to their posts. He had not slept the night; he felt the Deep Ones, and their songs whistled through the corridors of his mind.

Thomas never slept the night before a Catch. His bodily functions were accentuated, lifted. His requirements for nourishment rose and he sucked at his water tube constantly, ate continuously, sharp teeth tearing chunks from the *sonas* fish; he swallowed the pieces whole, not tasting them.

The food chute was full and he scooped handful of the white bellied fish into his food pouch. Until he entered the Hook, he

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would eat, stuffing himself. The Catch, once begun, would not allow time for food.

He pulled the gut cord and cold water sluiced over him, wetting and softening the gill slits along his back, rinsing the thick mucus coating from the delicate openings, allowing a new film to cover them.

He stood, naked, alive in the cold shadows of his deck hut, gills sucking open and closed, his sinewy muscles flexing. Webbed hands spread the viscous mucus over his head, gluing his thread-like hair to his wrinkled scalp. He flexed his trachea from lungs to gills; he lowered his eye membranes and lifted and curled the corded tendons of his wide, webbed feet.

"I'm old," he thought, flicking the eye membranes up. "But, Deep Ones, this last Catch for me will be a grand one. Perhaps the Answer will come this Catch."

He stiffened, head cocked to one side as if listening to a silent chorus. He heard the sounds of the Deep Ones as only a Hookman could. Loudly, their songs rang in his mind.

"Now." Baitman Thomas felt it, the cold heat in his belly, in his chest. It splintered his mind into spinning fragments. As if in ecstasy, his body quivered erect, hands at his sides. He struggled into his kilt and threw open the door of his hut with a hinge straining crash and emerged onto the deck, into the sunlight.

11.

"Hookman Thomas." Barge Master Nigg grabbed the door as it rebounded, preventing the Hookman from being struck. He felt almost afraid, seeing the Hookman like this; he always felt emotionally close to the Hookman at the beginning of a Catch. These strange men had always puzzled, fascinated him; but now was not the time for questions. It was time for the Catch.

The Hookman was snapping his jaws and swaying from side to side. Nigg took his elbow and shuddered at the cold feel of the mucus film that covered the Hookman's body.

He guided the stiff-legged Thomas through a corridor of crewmen; they murmured quiet encouragement as the Barge Master and Hookman passed.

Nigg felt Thomas vibrating and heard his low-voiced chant. He watched the mucus flow from the coarse pores surrounding the gills; the gills had to be kept moist and supple and Hookmen, when not in their water tanks, ate and drank almost constantly to prevent dehydration.

The Hook bobbed in its watery cradle. Nigg helped Thomas to

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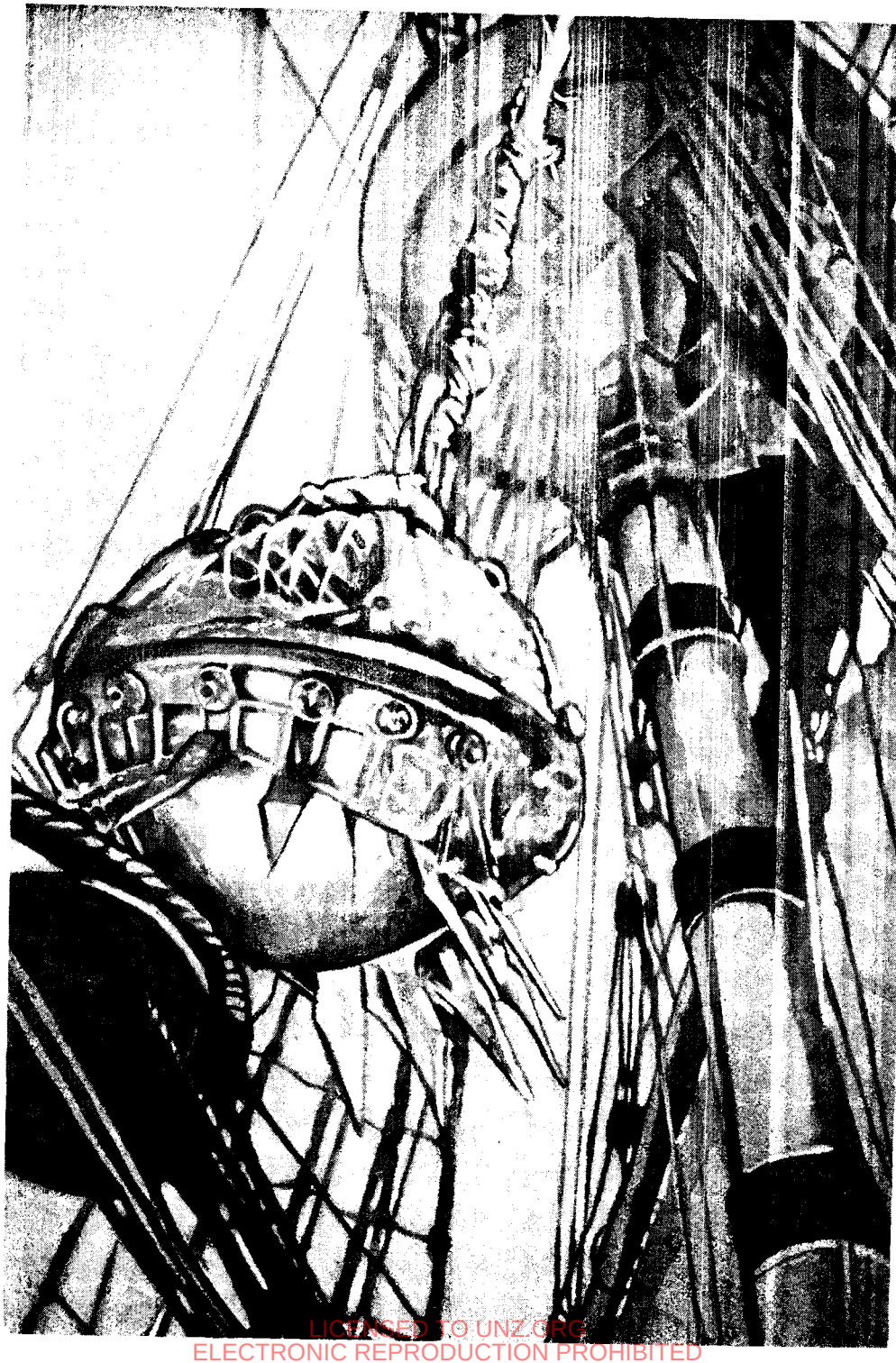

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the edge of the water, where the Hookman stood silently at the top step. He nodded his head, shed his kilt and supply pouches, and walked down into the cold water, edged through the hatch and settled himself into the Hook.

Barge Master Nigg watched the pink gill slits ripple along the back of Hookman Thomas as the membranes flickered over his eyes. Nigg lifted his arm and brought it down.

"Hook raising! Release lower net! Take up slack on the tie lines!"

The Catch Crane operator took up the line slack and the Hook rose up over the deck, swaying and dipping. Crewmen slipped their control lines and as the crane swung aft, eight crewmen on the control lines steadied the glittering, spiked ball, walked with it and shouted instructions to each other.

As the Hook swung around with the crane arm, Nigg moved with it, his single eye covering every movement of the crane and Hook. Facing aft, the Crane halted its movement; the Hook was ready for lowering.

"Lower the Hook!" Nigg roared.

As lines slipped over greased troughs and through eyelets, the Hook descended gently to the water at the end of the slant board.

"Release lines!"

The stabilizing control lines fell away from the Hook, running with a buzzing sound through the Hook loops. The Hook sank as the gears within the crane base revolved, paying out line.

Only one thin line, other than the thick main line, was still attached to the Hook. The Depth crew noted it carefully as it ratcheted through the depth measuring gear. The line caller shouted:

"One hundred . . . two hundred . . . three hundred!"

"Stop!" shouted Nigg.

The crane stopped running the line with a groan of gears.

"How do we stand, sir?" Nigg called to the crane operator. The crane man lowered his hand twice.

"Excellent! Continue to five hundred at slow run."

The line was paid out, hissing in its groove; the equalizing weights in bags attached to the bottom of the Hook drew it down into the calm sea. Just before a Strike, the Hookman would release the ballast; as the weighted pouches obstructed nearly a third of the blades of the Hook, a Catch could be lost if the timing of the ballast release was not perfect. The Hook, to be efficient, had to release each spike at the same instant. Thus, the ballast release was crucial.

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On the deck of the Catch Barge, its Master watched the line disappear with the presence of a man who had seen it many times before. Nigg still became nervous, alive with anticipation during this phase of the Catch. After the Hook was taken, after the Hookman . . . he shook his head as if to clear his mind.

Best that only Thomas think of what follows a Strike, Nigg thought. For all of his open-hearted love for the sea and his Barge, he preferred not to dwell on the duties of the Hookmen after they disappeared beneath the green mirror of the ocean. They were simply at home there, in the dark, swaying to the heartbeat of the water, opening themselves up, taking in the ocean's pulse, listening for the Deep Ones.

12.

A silver bubble sank alone, into a darkness that swarmed with minute life. A strand of web-like line streamed tautly upward as the Hook descended into the calm darkness. Small currents pushed the intruding bubble from side to side as it embedded itself deeper into the body of the sea. The speck of life in the bubble of the Hook breathed the water, gills rippling. Hookman Thomas was enveloped by calm darkness and he lost the sense of land, of air and firm earth; he melted into the environment of the Deep Ones as he faded from the world of clouds and men.

The Hook caught stray shafts of light that had somehow found their way into the depths and he opened his eyes, their membranes clear, washed and softened by this new and dense atmosphere.

Thomas thought of the solitude surrounding him, the immense distances spreading all around him, the world of water, cold, eddying him as gently as if he were in some gigantic womb.

Thomas ran his webbed hands over the chill ribs of the Hook, barely visible in the thick gloom. He watched with an interest born of experience as the mucus oozed from his body, glowing slightly as it reacted with the saline in the water. He increased the chemical flow to his eyes and the darkness drew away, his eyes adjusting, pulling the slim light from the dark and feeding the heightened images to his brain.

He marvelled at the perfect balance of this world. Hookmen survived within the belly of the sea and in the thin atmosphere above the surface on the small rocks with the unfortunate air-breathers. The Hookmen were sometimes pitied for their appearance, Thomas knew, but they were the lucky ones. Two worlds were theirs, and he thanked those supreme technicians who had

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engineered it all. His world was a created world, the system balanced delicately by those long-dead men from the sky.

The Hook whirled in a swirling shaft of slightly warmer water. The Herd was nearby. His gills flickered with excitement as his mind began to feel the curving caress of the Deep Ones.

At last! Hookman Thomas opened the channels of his mind to the Deep Ones, extended his lure to them, sent webs of love and desire and knowledge flickering through the black, solid night that pressed against him.

He adjusted the clever controls as he swivelled about within the Hook, alert for the beginning of the Ritual, the happening that took place each time, here far inside the secret waters, the dance of death between the Deep Ones and the Hookmen, the dance of life for them all. And an offering from the Deep Ones, the ultimate sacrifice to preserve the balance of two worlds.

The lure of Hookman Thomas was strong; despite his age, his skills were undiminished. The call went out from him and met the strange flowing web of the Deep Ones, centered on a single entity, and the strands of the two minds met and blended. Hookman and Deep One were coiled together, locked in an embrace as if by steel bands. Thomas began his final Catch. He reeled in the selected Deep One, drinking deep of the memories and experiences of the other mind.

Thomas knew this Deep One and he was honored. The giant shape was just visible at the limits of his vision. He knew the mind of the creature and he also knew that distance meant nothing, not until the Hook came into use. And that was, Hookman Thomas mused in a private niche of his mind, the kindest cruelty of all.

A wall of grey flesh circled the Hook. The mesh of minds was interlaced with sadness and yearning for release, emotions which pushed at the Hookman's mind like a blade.

Thoughts passed between the leviathan of the dark deep and the intruder in his metal carapace, but Thomas felt relief at the greeting he received. He returned the flow of emotion to the mountain of flesh and bone that moved across his field of vision and wondered at the Deep One: "How long? How long will this charade continue?"

The answer was a sigh that ripped through the mind web that linked them: "When we can die, Thomas. When we can die of our own failure to live. We are engines that never stop . . . until you call us and we come . . ."

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Thomas watched the great flukes push the Deep One past the Hook.

"Because one of you is so tired of life . . ." Thomas thought.

"We want to end it . . . being immortal is difficult, Hookman."

"Suicide, Deep One," Thomas answered, down there, deep in the dark.

"No . . . release, Hookman, release."

Thomas stiffened and quivered, thanking whatever gods there were that the Deep Ones only felt like dying every three or four periods . . . one could only absorb death, release or not, on this magnitude in infrequent doses. Thomas was glad that the new Hookmen would be Pulled soon.

"Tell me, Deep One," Thomas imaged through the dark as he stabilized the Hook. Bags of sand drifted down into a deeper night. "Answer the Question."

"The engineers from the skies who made us all . . . perhaps they erred, Hookman. I know your question; other Hookman have asked it before you on their last Catch and we think of it constantly . . . we have no answer. Perhaps our creators were not perfect . . . the air creatures above, they cannot know the Deeps. You live between the worlds; we live forever here, trapped, and when we are tired of life, you release us, Hookman, with your Hook . . ."

Thomas made ready to release the remaining ballast. The Deep One was nearly ready to complete the Ritual.

"Will it ever change, great Deep One? Can this circle of life and death ever be broken?" Thomas asked the final question that generations of Hookmen had always asked on their final Catch.

And as the giant cave of a mouth approached, he cast off the last of the balast and slid down, deep into the bowels of the leviathan, there to fire the blades and murder this ancient, tired creature; as he killed an otherwise immortal being whose death would give life to those above the smooth waters, Hookman Thomas wondered if this balance of life was as the ancient engineers had planned, if the circle of life could ever be changed.

And when the blades slithered into the flesh of the Deep One, the answer to the Question came and the web between them was severed.

13.

After the Deep One had been raised to the Catch Barge and made fast with many lines; after Hookman Thomas had been cut from the twisted stomach of the creature and placed in his deck

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hut to recover; after the Catch Barge, with happy, confident Oarsmen cracking their backs to bring the Barge back to port, had turned about; after the crew had celebrated, jocularity rampant on the Barge as the township was sighted; after the flares signalling a successful Catch were launched; after the barge was met by eager, happy townspeople and the Catch divided and dispersed to each and every one . . . after it was all done and the remaining blood of the Deep One had been sluiced from the deck into the recovery tanks, Barge Master Nigg waited on the silent deck for Hookman Thomas. He hadn't left his deck hut since being released from the Deep One, and Nigg was, as always, concerned. Two of the newly Pulled, young Hookmen stood with Nigg, cloaked and silent, their eagerness for details of the Catch awaiting Hookman Thomas.

The deck hut door opened silently and Thomas emerged. He walked angularly to the three waiting for him.

"Hookman Thomas. Are you well?" Nigg asked gently.

"Yes, Catch Barge Master Nigg. This was my last Catch. I had to dwell upon it for a time, alone," Thomas answered. "I will confer with the Council and my fellow Hookmen on the morrow at first light. Now I would like to return to my home for rest. You understand, sir?"

The three bowed their understanding and left him to walk home alone in the still night.

Thomas struggled homeward in the mud, the stars above glittering down silently. He paused at his door and looked up into the vastness of the black sky, a sky as black as the Deeps and as lonely as death.

"You cannot be right, Deep Ones!" Hookman Thomas thought. "Your answer will not always be correct. It must not be! Can this circle of survival be broken? You answered: Never! Never . . . I cannot believe you are right. This life we live *will* change . . . someday. The circle *will* be broken. It must be!"

With a final glance at the vast sky, the sea where men swam alone, the ocean of night that had been their womb ages ago, Baitman Thomas sighed a sound of faint hope and entered his dark home, to sleep and to dream of a different ocean. ●

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ON BOOKS by Baird Searles

The Eye of the Heron
By Ursula K. Le Guin
Harper & Row, $11.95

A couple of months ago, I was invited into the groves of Academe for a weekend of science fiction talk-talks. It was an enlightening experience, since I have had as little to do with academia since high school as possible; I won't go into the details of the subsequent culture shock aside from saying that apparently what the cap-and-gown set regard as SF has very little to do with what *I* know of as SF, even though it has reluctantly granted respectability to the field. (The current Big Book On Campus seems to be Zamiatin's *We*, one of those Meaningful, Satirical novels, written in Russia in 1920.)

However, one of the bits of common ground I could find was Ursula K. Le Guin. It seems that having read her work is a sure entree to acceptance as a bona fide science fiction person in academic circles. I was reminded of this on reading her "new" book, *The Eye of the Heron* for reasons which I'll enlarge on anon. I qualify the word new because this very short novel has appeared in print before, as a substantial part of the 1978 anthology *Millennial Women*, edited by Virginia Kidd. But since anthologies, even the really good ones, usually pass with little notice, since this story has been given the status of hardcover publication by itself, and since this is the last-published work (so far as I know) of any length by Le Guin that can be accurately called SF, its appearance should be noted.

The planet is called Victoria, and a century ago, it had received a one-way shipment of criminals from Brazil, mostly political dissidents, who established a fairly simple society ruled by a "Boss" and with a basic veneer of civilization based on what they had brought with them and the fact that Victoria provided fairly easily acquired resources.

A half-century later, another ship arrived, this one bearing a much more philosophically homogeneous group, pacifists who had fled Europe to Canamerica but who were not wel-

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comed there because of that country's war with "the Republic" (of China?). The newcomers to Victoria immediately become the underdogs and are consigned to work the land and live outside "the City"; for over fifty years, the two societies have existed separately and unequally. Things are coming to a crisis point over the fact that the Pacifist group wishes to begin a new colony far enough away from the City so as to be virtually independent. We see the conflict through the eyes of Luz, daughter of the current Boss but sympathetic to the other side.

The tale of two contrasting societies, of course, is sharply reminiscent of that in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, and like that work, *The Eye of the Heron* is written to tell us something. That becomes the more obvious because of its brevity and relative simplicity; lacking the length and detail of the earlier work, it is starkly didactic. Aside from some peripheral exotic flora and fauna, it could just as well be set in 19th century Australia or 18th century Georgia. This is not, let it be clear, to deny that we are given a dramatic situation played through by characters of depth and interest.

Le Guin's increasing tendency over the years to use her stories as vehicles for message at the expense of their science fictional content has decreased their impact, at least for the devotee of science fiction, despite the limpid writing and incisive characterization that are her hallmarks. Presumably this is why she has become St. Ursula of Academe. In my aforementioned collegiate foray, I heard endlessly about science fiction as sociology, science fiction as education, science fiction as satire, science fiction as vehicle for this message or that message; in short, science fiction as practically everything but science fiction. But the best science fiction, like the best art or the best music, exists by and for itself, and need not be defined or excused in terms of anything else. Le Guin has been responsible for some of the best, certainly, but *The Eye of the Heron* should probably have stayed as the minor anthology piece that it was originally.

King of the Wood
By John Maddox Roberts
Doubleday, $11.95

In the mid-15th century, the East Coast of the North American continent is divided between two nations. The Northern Treeland is Christian, due to the influence of Saxons fleeing the Norman Conquest who settled there in 1067, pushing south the original pagan Norse who had colonized the area during the century before. These now make

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up the population of Thorsheim, the southern nationa. Florida is entirely in the hands of the Moors, and all the American nations stand in awe of the Azteca, who rule all of Middle America and whose civilization, mighty cities, and armed power put the countries of Europe to shame. Their more primitive cousins, the Skraelings, are divided into many tribes to the North, living off the Giant's Flocks of the bison, and more or less tolerating the Norse and Saxon trappers who drift west.

The alternate-time story is a rare and delightful subgenre of science fiction (and barely *science* fiction at that, since it is based on the most abstruse theorizing about the nature of time). Being a history buff, I'm a sucker for a well done one, and John Maddox Roberts' *King of the Wood* is indeed rare and well done. It is set in the "time" and "place" outlined above; the differences from our own history are large-scaled and intriguing, but they are thought out intelligently and knowledgeably and all the small details ring true. (The sound of the American rattlesnake, for instance, is known as Loki's Laugh.)

In it we follow the adventures of one Hring Kristjanson, son of the thegn of Long Isle on the coast of Treeland, and exiled kinslayer. Due to his misfortunate murdering of his half brother, he wanders the length and breadth of this alternate North America. He guards a trade caravan to the Moorish Southern Penninsula; goes aviking among the Caribs of the islands; suffers hurricane and shipwreck on the Mexican coast and rises to a high place among the Azteca; lives among the hunters of the Giant's Flocks on the Great Plains.

There's lots of fighting and adventures, culminating in the great battle for Tenochtitlan between the Aztecs and the Mongols (yes, Mongols). It's really a boy's adventure book for grownups; the writing and characterization are not exactly subtle (sometimes too much the opposite, in fact), and the action speeds along at breakneck pace—no situation lasts long enough to become remotely tedious. But the background world is so well-structured that, in a way, it supplies the intellectual values that the plot may lack. This is really one to have fun with.

Fevre Dream
By George R.R. Martin
Poseidon Press, $14.95

One sort of novel these days that is anything but rare and seldom well done is the vampire story, of which I've had enough (maybe a liberal shipment of garlic to all publishers might help). But by Sturgeon's law, a few *have* to be acceptable, and

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one of those has come along to ease my impatience with the subgenre.

A curious trend with the Transylvanian tidal wave to which we've been subjected lately is a distinct move away from supernatural fantasy (of which the vampire tale is the epitomal example) towards a kind of science fiction, representing the "undead" as another race, perhaps a mutated offshoot of humanity, perhaps something else entirely, a sort of parasitical companion through the ages.

It is the latter view that George R.R. Martin espouses in *Fevre Dream* and he succeeds in carrying it off quite convincingly. The parasitic race is not prolific in its breeding, and while much of what is said about vampires is legendary nonsense, they are indeed ultrasensitive to the sun's rays, which limits their activities and certainly makes them vulnerable to attack by the "cattle," as they call mankind, during their dormant daytime period. These factors limit their numbers, and they are a sparse breed.

The action of the novel takes place in the mid-19th century along the Mississippi River; Martin has certainly done his homework here, because he evokes the antebellum riverboat culture with great accuracy. The hero (and he is a hero in the old-fashioned sense of the word) is a middle-aged, uncultured, ugly riverboat captain, Abner Marsh.

Abner's small shipping line is about to go under when a seemingly eccentric and immensely wealthy gentleman offers to buy in, and in effect to subsidize the building of a steamboat which will be the wonder of the river. The ship is indeed built, and christened *Fevre Dream*, and the wealthy Joshua York takes up residence on her.

Slowly Abner realizes that York is vampire-hunting down the length of the Mississippi; even more slowly he begins to suspect that the compelling aristocrat might be a vampire himself. The riverboat captain is drawn into the secret world of the vampires, and the epic battle that is shaping between Joshua York and the demonic Damon Julian, the oldest and most corrupt of his race.

The portrayal of the parisitic race as nonmonolithic, as made up of individuals of different moralities in conflict, is a fresh and interesting one. Perhaps Martin carries the conflict on too long, with a little too much back and forthing, a few too many trips up and down the river. On the other hand, the view of the legendary life on the Mississippi in this period is so rich that one wants it to go on as long as the Big Muddy itself.

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Fevre Dream is one addition to the literature for vampiromaniacs that's worth taking a look at.

Red As Blood
By Tanith Lee
DAW Books, $2.50 (paper)

Subtitled "Tales from the Sisters Grimmer," *Red As Blood* is a collection of mostly minor but diverting stories by Tanith Lee, who seems to have made a project over the past few years of writing variations on the classic fairy tales. In each she has provided characters and motivation a bit beyond the sometimes surrealist components of Grimm, De Beaumont & Co., and usually a successful twist that makes the story something more than a fleshed-out retelling.

In "Paid Piper," there's some anthropological juggling, pitting the compelling piper against Raur, the rat god of Lime Tree village, and equating him (the piper) with Dionysius and perhaps, by implication, Christ, which makes it sound a good deal more heavyweight than it is. The title story is enough to make Walt Disney turn over in his grave, giving us Snow White (here Bianca) as a vampire (which makes problems for that snoopy Magic Mirror) and the Witch Queen as heroine; Beauty's rose is brought back by her merchant father from space and her Beast is alien; and the Frog Prince has an Indian flavor and is very nasty indeed. So is Ashella, who drives the Prince mad, which is why he has the balmy notion that the slipper will fit only one foot (a point I always wondered about).

Lee manages to give this collection, which could have had a one-joke sameness, a good deal of variety; it's consistently entertaining for adults and probably less psychologically damaging for the kiddies than the originals.

The Dreamstone
By C.J. Cherryh
DAW Books, $2.75 (paper)

A change of pace for C.J. Cherryh is manifested in her new *The Dreamstone* and the gamble (it's always a gamble for the successful writer to try something new rather than repeat what's worked) has paid off handsomely. This may be her best work so far; I know I found it more appealing than anything of hers I've read.

She has, until now, been known for her science fiction, though some of that has been adroitly veneered with the appearance of heroic fantasy. But the new novel is unabashedly pure fantasy, curiously small scaled; it could be called chamber fantasy, perhaps. The setting is in some semilegendary time in a place and society that

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is determinedly Celtic—character names include Ruaidhrigh (Rory), Donnchadh (Duncan), and Dryw (Drew), so the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh branches are all represented. If it is not the Celtic twilight, though, it is certainly late afternoon. All but one of the Daoine Sidhe, the elves, the most powerful of the Fair Folk, have faded across the sea.

The novel is about the relationship of that survivor, Arafel, with three generations of one family, through a time of war and strife which intrudes on her wood. She almost casually saves the life of the human, Niall, and sends him to refuge in a kind of out-of-doors elf mound, Beorc's Steading, a haven for hunted creatures of all kinds. (Beorc is reminiscent of a nonextrovert Tom Bombadil.)

Duty brings Niall back to the world of men; through the years Arafel, by chance and destiny, encounters certain of his family and friends, concluding with Ciaran, whom Niall's granddaughter loves and in whose veins runs the faintest trace of elf blood. And Ciaren can finally end the ongoing bloodshed only by accepting the stone of Liosliath, the last of the elf Princes, and endangering his own humanity forever.

That bare outline can't really do justice to this lovely work, which is at times oblique and far from direct (the viewpoint is often elvin rather than human), at times powerfully evocative; between human and Sidhe are differences to the point of enmity as strong as between the human heros and villains. There are moments that are immensely moving, as in the description of the ill and aging Niall and his memories of Beorc's Steading, and Ciaran's waking tearful from the first dream of Elfdom. And though I have called it a chamber fantasy, there are far larger implications to the final battle than just the holding of Caer Weill by a few defenders from the uncivilized clans attacking it.

And finally, the inclusion of personified Death as a character in any fantasy is almost a sure sign of pretentious allegory. In *The Dreamstone*, Cherryh somehow brings it off without coming across like *The Seventh Seal*.

This is a small gem of a novel. I hope its lack of a garrulous wizard, a rampaging dragon, epic battles with a cast of thousands, and lots of cute supporting characters will not blind the fantasy reading public to its quality.

The Queen of the Legion
By Jack Williamson
Timescape, $2.95 (paper)

It never ceases to amaze that, as sophisticated and wide-rang-

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ing as science fiction has become, its origins are still not that far in the past and some of those who molded its form as we know it (in the American pulp-adventure tradition) are still with us and productive. Back in the 1930s, perhaps the only stories that rivalled E.E. Smith's great Lens saga in popularity were those rousing tales by Jack Williamson about the Legion of Space. The first was published in 1934.

It quite honestly moves me that now, nearly a half-century later in 1983, there is a *new* Legion of Space story by Williamson, just as rousing, just as readable. In what other contemporary field could this happen?

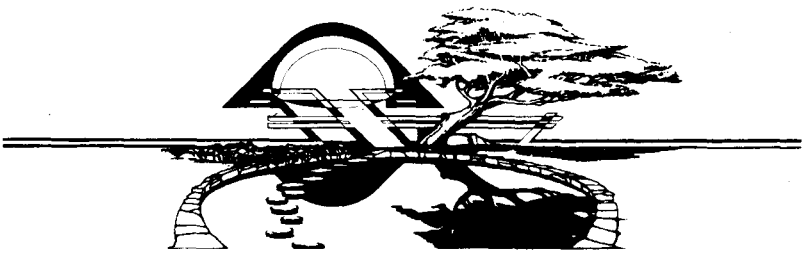
The Queen of the Legion is unabashedly space opera; Williamson has made no pretence at anything else. This is the Horatia Alger story of Jil Gyrel, born of a Legion family (need I even say that the Legion of Space keeps the peace throughout the inhabited galaxy), done out of her inheritance by her wicked stepfather, and who, with pluck and luck, saves civilization from its greatest threat so far, the parasitic, mind-absorbing Shadowflashers of the Hawkshead Nebula. (They also smell bad.)

And old Legionaries will be overjoyed to know that halfway through the book, there appears one of the most beloved of SF figures, the truly legendary (Legiondary?) Giles Habibula.

It's all reactionary as hell (including the politics—one can see where SF got its early reputation as militaristic), but who cares? The story's the thing and anything it's telling us beyond that is incidental.

So welcome back to the whole damned Legion; I hope there's a new novel about it in 2034. Heaven help science fiction if it ever gets too grownup for this kind of thing.

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, %The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10014. ●



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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The rush of con(vention)s leading up to WorldCon is in full swing, and the weather is great for traveling. Make plans now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273-6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send a #10 SASE when writing cons. When calling, it's polite to give your name right away. Look for me under the Filthy Pierre badge.

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15–17—**RiverCon, Box 8251, Louisville KY 40208.** Galt House Hotel. Riverboat ride Sun. Costumes.

15–17—**UniCon, Box 263, College Park MD 20740.** Silver Spring, MD. Joan Vinge, Teanna Lee Byerts.

15–17—**Spokon, 11210 E. Broadway, Spokane, WA 99206.** David Eddings, Jon Gustafson, F. M. Busby.

15–17—**OKon, Box 4229, Tulsa, OK 74104.** Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle ("Oath of Fealty"), Gordon (Hoka) Dickson, artists Dell Harris & Real Musgrave. Combined with FilkCon (SF folksinging con).

29–31—**ParaCon, Box 1156, State College PA 16801. (814) 237–5262.** Ben ("Colony") Bova, Virginia Kidd, artist Roger Pollock. Masquerade, banquet. Out of the way, but well worth the trip. Mellow.

29–31—**BecCon, 191 The Heights, Northolt, Middlesex UB5 4BU, UK.** Essex Crest Hotel, Basildon.

AUGUST, 1983

5–7—**StarCall, 225 Church St., Vienna VA 22180. (703) 281–2711.** Rosslyn VA (near Washington DC). A. (Rosinante) Gilliland, S. (Mallworld) Sucharitkul, G. (Dorsai) Dickson, James Gunn. Posted date, place and guests have changed frequently—call con to confirm specifics before coming.

12–14—**Half MystiCon, Box 1367, Salem VA 24153.** Roanoke VA. Orson Scott Card. Very relaxed con.

12–15—**MythCon, Box 711, Seal Beach CA 90740.** Stephen R. Donaldson. Theme: Mythic Structures in Tolkien, Lewis & Williams. Costumes, drama, pageantry, academic papers.

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1–5—**ConStellation, Box 1046, Baltimore MD 21203.** John Brunner, David (Lensman) Kyle, Jack (Well of Souls) Chalker. 1983 WorldCon. Join by July 15 (postmark) for $40, or more at door.

23–25—**Invention, 10 Woodlands Gardens, Glasgow, Scotland G71 8NU, UK. (041) 882–3006.** Chris ("Catchworld") Boyce, Jim Barker. Vogon poetry competition (per "Hitchikers Guide").

OCTOBER 1983

7–9—**NonCon, Box 475, Sta. G, Calgary Alta. T3A 2G4.** O. Scott Card. The Great White North lives.

AUGUST, 1984

30–Sep. 3—**LACon 3, Box 8442, Van Nuys CA 91409.** Anaheim CA. The '84 WorldCon. Membership $40.

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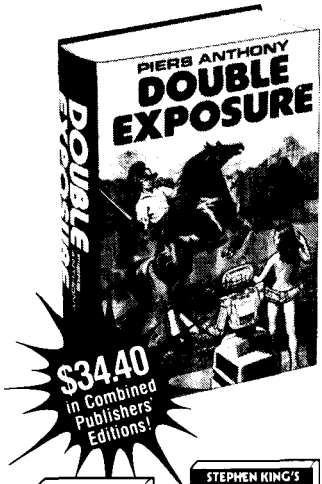

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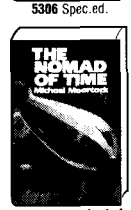

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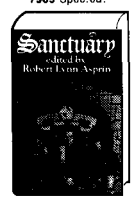

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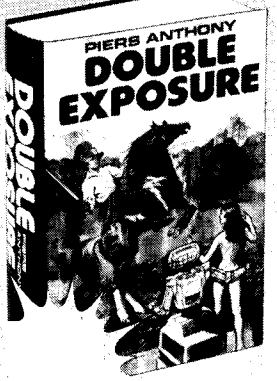

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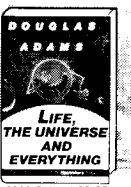

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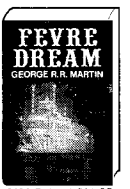

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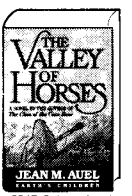

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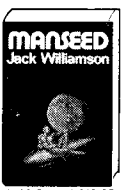

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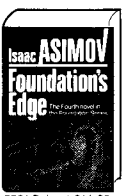

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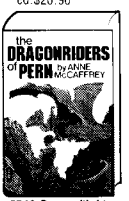

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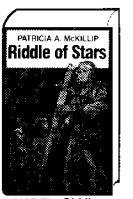

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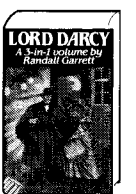

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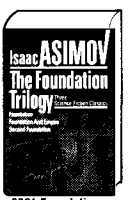

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